Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia

An Anthology of the Earliest Female Authors

Charles Halton and
Saana Svärd

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Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia presents fresh and engaging translations of works that were composed or edited by female scribes and elite women of the ancient Near East. These texts provide insight into the social status, struggles, and achievements of women during the earliest periods of recorded human history (ca. 2300–540 BCE). In three introductory chapters and a concluding chapter, Charles Halton and Saana Svärd provide an overview of the civilization of ancient Mesopotamia and examine gender by analyzing these different kinds of texts. The translations cover a range of genres, including hymns, poems, prayers, letters, inscriptions, and oracles. Each text is accompanied by a short introduction that situates the composition within its ancient environment and explores what it reveals about the lives of women within the ancient world. This anthology will serve as an essential reference book for scholars and students of ancient history, gender studies, and world literature.

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To Ettore Cingano and Lucio Milano and the faculty and fellows of the Advanced Seminar in the Humanities 2011–2012 at Venice International University.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book exists because Ettore Cingano and Lucio Milano organized a research seminar on the study of the ancient Mediterranean. The seminar convened for several weeks at Venice International University on the island of San Servolo, a five-minute *vaporetto* ride from St. Mark's square in Venice, Italy. The idea for this book came about during conversations in between lectures and presentations and over many shots of espresso, grappa, and vino from the Veneto region.

Charles lamented the lack of a book which gathered together the cuneiform texts that are attributed to female authors. One of the difficulties of studying the ancient world and Mesopotamia in particular is that the primary texts that make up the field are published in thousands of obscure journals, monographs, and *Festschriften*. There are very few indexes and anthologies that guide scholars to them. A photographic memory and an exhaustive library are essential to studying all but the most general of topics. This is starting to change with the emergence of the *Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record* series published by Ugarit-Verlag and various anthologies of cuneiform literature in translation. But nothing like this existed for texts attributed to female authors.

Saana shared Charles's lament and believed that an anthology of female writing had the potential to open up new avenues of study. We began assembling a list of texts that an anthology would include and pitched the idea to publishers. Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press strongly supported the project and suggested that we also include discussions that guided readers in how they could productively approach female-authored texts and reflections on what this literature can teach us about the lives of ancient women.

Even though we have closely collaborated throughout the production of this book, we divided the work fairly evenly. Charles wrote the first chapter and translated most of the older texts including the Sumerian compositions, scholarly documents, hymns and poems, and oracles from Mari. Saana wrote chapters 2 and 3 and most of the conclusion. She also translated the later texts including the letters, Neo-Assyrian oracles, and Akkadian inscriptions. We are very grateful to Eduardo Escobar for allowing us to publish his translation of the perfume recipe in chapter 9.

We would like to thank our original commissioning editor Beatrice Rehl, who believed in our project, and Anastasia Graf and the rest of the editorial and production team at Cambridge who brought it into reality. The

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Notes to the Reader

The focus of this book is on Mesopotamia, more specifically texts written in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages. We have mainly concentrated on the heartland of Mesopotamia, the area surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A slight exception to this are the texts from the kingdom of Mari, which was located to the west of Mesopotamia proper. This focus was chosen for two main reasons. Even with this focus the topic is huge, covering millennia and much of the Near East. To cover all of the Mediterranean world and its dozens of languages and cultures would have been too big a project. However, as it turns out, most of the concrete examples of cuneiform texts attributed to females are from Mesopotamia and Mari (see details in chapter 1). For instance, there are no extant texts from Ugarit that are known to have been written by a woman.

Regarding special characters, in translations we have kept Š and Ṭ, but instead of Ḫ, the Roman H is used. Contracted vowels are shown (e.g., Nabû) but not the lengthening of vowels (e.g., ū). However, in transliterations of ancient vocabulary (e.g., *ḫarimtu*), the diacritics are kept. These choices are a compromise between Assyriological conventions that attempt to accurately reproduce phonetics and the need to use reader-friendly diacritics.

Line numbers are given, but to offer smoother translations we usually translate in blocks. Parentheses are used to indicate texts which are added by us, the translators. Square brackets are used to indicate restorations of texts that have broken away from the original. However, only sections that are completely destroyed are placed in square brackets: we have not placed square brackets in the middle of words. Missing sections are indicated with three periods, but when possible, we try to indicate the approximate extent of missing text when the missing sections are thought to be more than one line. The ′ after a line number means that since a part of the text is missing, the line numbers are uncertain. In other words, line 1′ is the first line after an indeterminate break in the text.

As for the style of translations, we have attempted to toe the blurry line between too literal and too liberal translations. Too literal translations leave the meaning of the text unclear to readers unfamiliar with Sumerian and Akkadian language. At the same time, too liberal translations can demolish the intent of the ancient author. Needless to say, this line is highly subjective and translations offered here will no doubt seem either too literal or too liberal to many of the expert readers.

Table 0.1 *Mesopotamian Measures*

Sumerian	**Akkadian**	**Modern translation**	**Modern value (approximate)**
GÍN	*šiqlum*	shekel	8.3 grams
MA.NA	*manûm*	mina	500 grams
GÚ.UN	*biltum*	talent	30 kilograms
SILA3	*qûm*	liter	1 liter
BÁN	*sūtum*	seah	10 liters
NIGIDA (PI)	*pānum/parsiktum*	fifth-of-a-kor	60 liters
GUR	*kurrum*	kor	300 liters

For each text we have compiled a brief bibliography to help the readers along should they be inclined to know more about the ancient texts. When possible, we included information on where the drawing (so-called cuneiform copy) or photograph of the original text can be found and information on transliteration, transcription, and translation of the text in question. These will enable professionals to engage with texts more fully. We have also included a selection of the most reliable, often the most recent studies on the text, where the reader will get a more detailed bibliography. Full bibliographical references are included in the footnotes of the chapters. The first time a work is mentioned in each chapter full bibliographical information is given, after that the work is referred to with an abbreviated title.

The translations within this book are not new editions. That is, we did not recollate the texts. Instead, we used the most recent editions and other previous work done on the texts as the basis of our translations. Thus we remain hugely indebted to the scholars who published primary sources. At the same time, we hope to have been able to contribute some new readings and insights into documents translated in this volume.

All dates used within this book are BCE unless otherwise indicated. Measurements are translated into English (mina, shekel, etc.) but a table for conversion is included here (following John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 3rd edn. [Harvard Semitic Museum Studies 45; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011]). The exact values of these units varied throughout history but the table will give the reader a rough idea of the modern values.

Abbreviations

ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AS	Assyriological Studies
CAD	A. Leo Oppenheim, *et al.*, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956ff)
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
COS	*The Context of Scripture*, 3 vols. (ed. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002)
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/)
GMTR	Guide to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
MSL	Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon/Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon
NABU	*Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods (Toronto, 1987ff.)
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods (Toronto, 1990ff.)
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings of the Ancient World
SP	E. I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1959)
VAT	Museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Vorderasiatische Abteilung. Tontafeln)
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*

PART I

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

The Origins of Writing in Mesopotamia

> In the very first year there appeared from the Red Sea (the Persian Gulf) in an area bordering on Babylonia, a frightening monster, named Oannes . . . Berossos says that this monster spent its days with men, never eating anything, but teaching men the skills necessary for writing and for doing mathematics and for all sorts of knowledge . . .
>
> –*Eusebius on Berossos's History*[1]

> Because the messenger's mouth was too heavy, and he could not repeat it, the lord of Kulab patted some clay and put the words on it as on a tablet. Before that day, there had been no putting words on clay . . .
>
> –*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*[2]

It was once thought that writing developed in Mesopotamia – the "land between two rivers" – and spread to other cultures through trade, imperialism, and other forms of cultural contact. More recent studies have shown that four distinct cultures within Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and Mesoamerica invented writing independently.[3] Most of these cultures had accounting devices for thousands of years before a system of writing arose. The difference between an accounting system and writing is that writing represents speech through marks on a surface while an accounting system represents ideas or quantities only and is not directly connected with speech. In other words, through writing a reader can recover the utterance of a writer without the intervention, or even the presence, of the utterer.[4]

1 Gerald P. Verbrugghe and John M. Wickersham, *Berossus and Manetho: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 44.

2 Herman Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta* (SBLWAW 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 85.

3 The best treatment of this subject is the compilation of essays in *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond* (ed. Christopher Woods; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2010) which can be downloaded free of charge at http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/oimp/oimp32.html.

4 Peter T. Daniels, "The Study of Writing Systems," in *The World's Writing Systems* (ed. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

The movement from accounting systems to written language appeared virtually simultaneously in Mesopotamia and Egypt around 3300 to 3200 BCE. A couple of millennia later an oracle-bone inscription from the late thirteenth century BCE marks the first known example of grammatically connected symbols in China. Finally, writing is thought to have developed within Maya society somewhere between 1200 and 600 BCE; however, the earliest known examples appear within palace murals from 300–200 BCE at San Bartolo, Guatemala.[5]

Even though Mesopotamia has been displaced as the sole originator of writing it remains unique, for the time being at least, as the only culture of early antiquity for which there are examples of literature written by women. In fact, a priestess from Ur is often identified as "the first real author, in the modern sense of that word, known to world history."[6] Furthermore, the patron deity of all Mesopotamian scribes was the goddess Nisaba. This is not to say that female scribes were ubiquitous. On the contrary, like many other aspects of ancient society scribal culture was predominantly male. In spite of this, within an environment in which hardly anyone – male and female alike – was able to read and write, more than a few women learned this skill and produced a sizable number of documents.

Undoubtedly, literate women populated ancient cultures besides Mesopotamia. Several Egyptian tombs contain artistic representations of women who appear to read or write and some scholars have suggested that short notes sent by Egyptian females to their friends may have been written by the women themselves; however, this remains a matter of speculation.[7] Even though most regard it as unlikely, a few scholars posit that women may have composed anonymous works or written under male pen names in Hittite and Israelite societies.[8] Even though there are indicators and possibilities for female literacy throughout the ancient Near East, Mesopotamia remains the only culture of early antiquity for which female

5 William A. Saturno, David Stuart, and Boris Beltrán, "Early Maya Writing at San Bartolo, Guatemala," *Science* 311/5765 (3 March 2006): 1281–1283.

6 Aage Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture" in *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (ed. Walther Sallaberger and Aage Westenholz; Oribs Biblicus and Orientalis 160/3; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1999), 76.

7 Rivkah Harris, "The Female 'Sage' in Mesopotamian Literature," in *The Sage in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 15 and David P. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81, respectively.

8 On the unlikelihood of females using male pen names in Anatolia see Jared L. Miller, *Studies in the Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Kizzuwatna Rituals* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 479 n804. A handful of scholars have proposed female authorship of various biblical books: see Part II *of A Feminist Companion to Song of Songs* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 58–99.

scribes are well documented and from which texts attributed to female authors survive to this day.[9]

1.1 Mythological Origins of Writing in Mesopotamia

Writing is one of the most significant inventions in human history. It enabled people to do things that were previously almost unimaginable. Kings could give direct orders to far flung generals and scribes could continue to teach students even after their death. A quick stroke of the stylus magically broke through the seemingly impenetrable boundaries of time and space. No longer did officials have to depend upon the memories and fidelity of messengers to properly relay instructions, they could send their own words wrapped in tamper-resistant envelopes. Scribes could compose literature that was read and recopied for centuries. Given its significance it is no wonder that fantastical stories shrouded the origin of writing in myth. Perhaps the most interesting was told by a third-century BCE Babylonian priest, Berossos.

In a history of Babylonia Berossos describes a primordial world populated with monsters – human-like figures, some with wings, some with two faces and sets of sexual organs, others that sprouted tails or walked with goats' legs. At this time animals with interchanged features, such as horses with dogs' heads and the like, roamed the earth. The chief deity, Bel, cut the goddess of the sea in half and from her body parts made the heavens and the earth. Bel then cut through the darkness and separated night from day. The monsters were unable to survive the strength of the light and perished. Bel repopulated the earth by creating humans from a mixture of dirt and the blood which flowed out of another god's severed head. On the first day of this new earth Oannes, a half-fish half-humanoid monster that survived the previous events, crawled out of the Persian Gulf and taught humans how to build temples and cities, to make laws, to gather food, and to write. The story Berossos told pictured writing as something that existed before the present order of the world, a gift given to humanity by a being that bridged the divine and human realms.[10]

On the other hand, the early second-millennium Sumerian story, Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, located the invention of writing in the ingenuity of a king. According to the legend the king of Uruk, Enmerkar, sent a messenger to the king of Aratta to procure gold, silver, and lapis-lazuli.

9 The women of Greece and Rome produced many texts, starting with Sappho (born ca. 630 BCE); I.M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). However, virtually every composition within this anthology precedes Sappho and Enheduanna does so by a full millennium and half.

10 Verbrugghe and Wickersham, *Berossus and Manetho*, 44 and Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 132–134.

Before the king of Aratta would trade with Enmerkar he posed a series of riddles. A messenger had to shuttle in between the two kings, conveying the riddle one way and then on the return, the answer. The riddles became increasingly complicated until the messenger was unable to adequately remember them. In response, Enmerkar scooped clay out of the ground, fashioned it into a tablet, and for the first time wrote down the spoken word.[11]

1.2 The Invention of Writing in Mesopotamia

As entertaining as these accounts are, neither reflects the picture that the earliest tablets themselves present. However, the Enmerkar story does contain an element that reflects a degree of reality – the earliest known examples of writing stem from the city of Uruk. Uruk, modern Warka, is located along a now dry tributary of the Euphrates in southern Iraq (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In the late fourth millennium it was the largest city in Mesopotamia if not the world. The population of Uruk increased from about 20,000 to 50,000 inhabitants between 3,500 and 3,100 BCE and the leaders of the city-state managed this growth with a vast and hierarchical bureaucracy.[12] Writing arose in order to provide a more robust level of accounting and accountability in this increasingly complicated sociopolitical structure.[13] The earliest tablets from Uruk contain numerical entries that document complex transactions involving a variety of goods. To put it differently, the world's first writing was invented in order to facilitate bookkeeping.

The system of writing employed at Uruk combined numerical features already employed with counting tokens and pictorial representations. For several thousand years Mesopotamians had used small lumps of clay engraved with symbols to aid in counting. For instance, a small ball might have a sign indicating a sheep. These tokens could be counted and totaled, functioning like an abacus of sorts, or they could be traded and redeemed at a future time. Scribes invented a writing *system* when they combined numerical symbols used on these tokens with stylized pictures indicating commodities

11 Concomitantly, this story represents writing as "an oral discourse fixed on a support" while modern theories tend to focus upon the pictorial representation of early writing that subsequently gained phonetic values, Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 2 and 255 n2.

12 Christopher Woods, "The Earliest Mesopotamian Writing," in *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond* (ed. Christopher Woods; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2010), 34.

13 Writing arose independently in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China also as a response to organizational complexity. Writing apparently developed for different reasons within Maya culture; see Jerrold S. Cooper, "Babylonian Beginnings: The Origin of the Cuneiform Writing System in Comparative Perspective," in *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process* (ed. Stephen D. Houston; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 71–99.

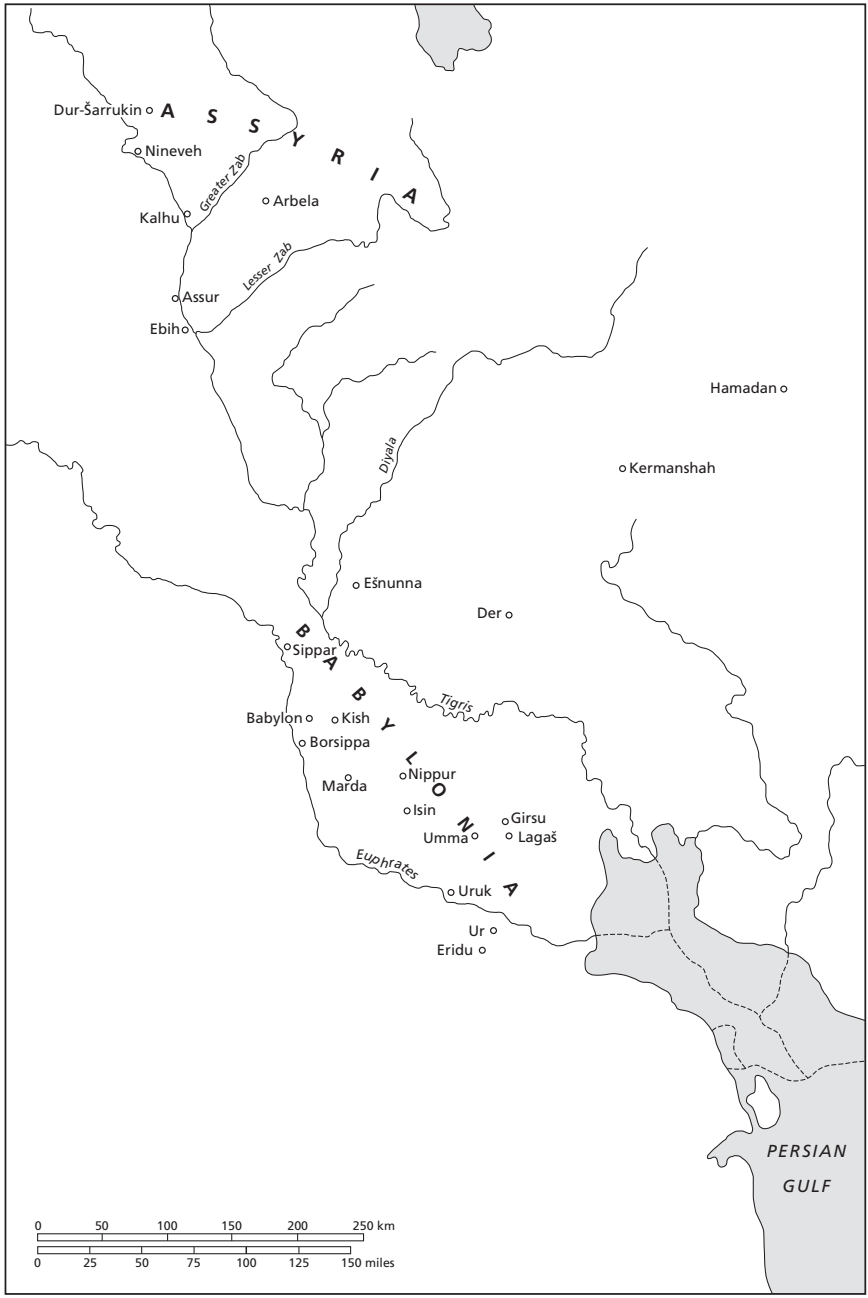
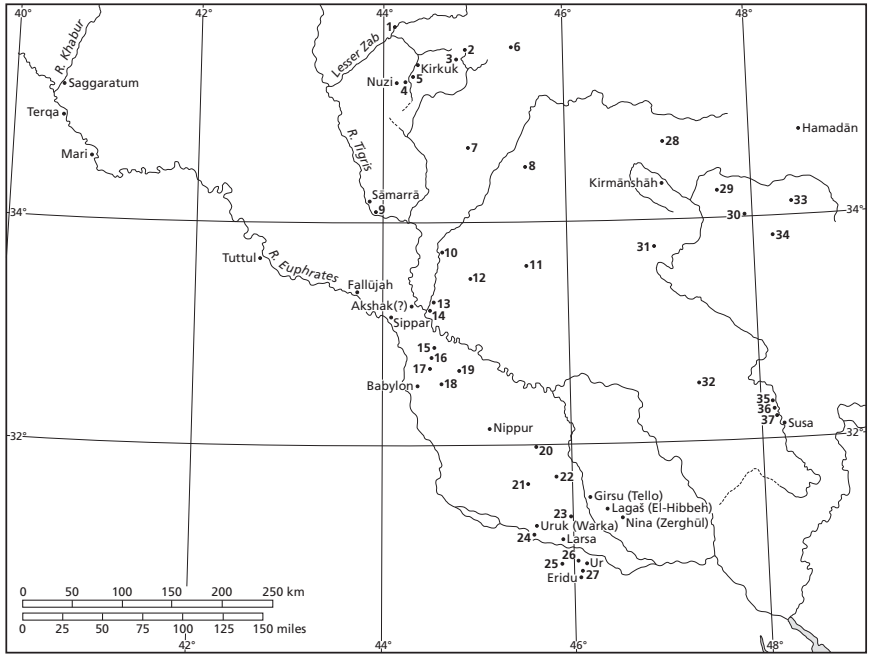


Figure 1.1: Babylonia and Assyria



Numerical key

1 Altin Köprü	11 Mandali	21 Shuruppak	31 Tepe Gūrān
2 Jarmo	12 Ešnunna (Tell Asmar)	22 Umma	32 Tepe Mussian
3 Chamchamal	13 Khafājī (Tutub)	23 Badtibira	33 Tepe Giyān
4 Kurdish Şaghīr	14 Ishchali	24 Qal'at Ḥajji Muḥammad	34 Alīshtar
5 Matarrah	15 Tell 'Uqair	25 Reijibeh	35 Tepe Bandibāl
6 Sulaimaniyyah	16 Tell Ibrāhīm (Kutha)	26 Al-'Ubaid	36 Tepe Jaui
7 Kifrī	17 Ras el-'Amiya	27 Mereijeb	37 Tepe Ja'farābād
8 Qaṣr-i-Shīrīn	18 Kish	28 Tepe Sarāb	
9 Tell es-Sawwān	19 Jamdat Naṣr	29 Harsīn	
10 Ba'qūbā	20 Adab	30 Delfan	

Alphabetical key

Adab	20	Jaui (Tepe Jaui)	38	Tell Asmar (Ešnunna)	12
Alīshtar	34	Khafājī (Tutub)	13	Tell Ibrāhīm (Kutha)	16
Altin Köprü	1	Kifrī	7	Tell es-Sawwān	9
Badtibira	23	Kish	18	Tell 'Uqair	15
Bandibāl (Tepe Bandibāl)	37	Kurdish Şaghīr	4	Tepe Bandibāl	35
Ba'qūbā	10	Kutha (Tell Ibrāhīm)	16	Tepe Giyān	33
Chamchamal	3	Mandali	11	Tepe Gūrān	31
Delfan	30	Matarrah	5	Tepe Ja'farābād	37
Ešnunna (Tell Asmar)	12	Mereijeb	27	Tepe Jaui	36
Ḥajji Muḥammad (Qal'at Ḥajji Muḥammad)	24	Qal'at Ḥajji Muḥammad	24	Tepe Mussian	32
Harsīn	29	Qaṣr-i-Shīrīn	8	Tepe Sarāb	28
Ishchali	14	Ras el-'Amiya	17	Tutub (Khafājī)	13
Ja'farābād (Tepe Ja'farābād)	39	Reijibeh	25	Al-'Ubaid	26
Jamdat Naṣr	19	Sarāb (Tepe Sarāb)	28	Umma	22
Jarmo	2	Shuruppak	21	'Uqair (Tell 'Uqair)	15
		Sulaimaniyyah	6		

Figure 1.2: Babylonia and Western Persia

such as wheat and cattle in order to produce itemized records of transactions between government offices and individuals. The Uruk tablets are distinguished from earlier accounting lists, and concomitantly mark the transition from numerical notations to a full fledged writing system, since they add titles, names, and transaction types to signs for numbers and commodities. This system was fairly daunting since it used, according to some calculations, over 2,000 individual signs, which were eventually consolidated to around 600.[14]

At first pictographs merely depicted the objects to which they referred. For instance, the outline of a head of a cow depicted a cow. As the writing system developed signs took on other meanings as well. A sign could represent not only a physical object but also a similarly sounding word or idea. A hypothetical example of this concept would be using a picture of an eye to signify the pronoun "I."[15] This innovation led the way for further linguistic development since phonetic values could be used to indicate ideas or syntactical relationships that are unrelated to concrete things. This facilitated the representation of relationships like ownership – the governor's cattle – and non-physical concepts like love. Over time the pictographs became more and more abstract until the objects they originally represented were in many cases practically indiscernible in the shapes of the signs. Eventually, many signs took on phonetic values, or sounds, that were derived from but not identical to the sign's original meaning. These phonetic values could be combined with other sounds to form words whose meanings were different from any of the signs that composed them. At this point the connection between a sign, its sound, and its meaning was very loose if intact at all.

If this system of writing sounds complicated that is because it was. But this is the nature of language; languages are constantly in flux. "Nature is dynamic, and so is language," said nature writer Robert MacFarlane.[16] The meanings of words change and morph and new words are created or borrowed. Ralph Waldo Emerson noted the way that the meanings of words within the English language had strayed from their original connotations. Like what happened with Sumerian and Akkadian, they became more abstract: "Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin."[17]

14 The first figure comes from J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1994), 54, while the second is from Woods, "The Earliest Mesopotamian Writing," 37.

15 This example is taken from Woods, "The Earliest Mesopotamian Writing," 20.

16 *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), 13.

17 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: Second Series* (ed. Joseph Slater *et al.*; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1844), 13.

It took a substantial investment of time and energy to gain a facility in the cuneiform script, not to mention the language itself. Accordingly, small schools sprung up. Sometimes they were sponsored by the king but at other times they were privately run tutorial apprenticeships in which several students at a time gathered in a small courtyard and learned their new craft. Oftentimes fathers taught their children and possibly took on an extra child or two in the process. Teachers demonstrated the mechanics of forming wet clay into a tablet, how to turn a reed into a stylus, and how to impress the stylus into the clay to form the wedge-like, or cuneiform, shapes that represented objects, words, and sounds.

In this setting repetition was the mother of learning, and students copied the signs over and over again, moistening the tablet and reusing it. Typically, an instructor would make an "exercise" tablet by writing a line of signs which the student would then copy underneath or on the back. Once the students were able to form the signs, they learned their meanings and phonetic values by copying lists which arranged signs according to their topic or category. Finally, students copied examples of the accounting texts that they were likely to encounter as they carried out their duties within the various bureaucratic institutions that ran the city-states. For hundreds of years these three types of texts – scribal exercises, lexical lists, and accounting tablets – were the only genres of writing in existence within Mesopotamia.

In contrast to the stories that Mesopotamians wrote about the origins of writing, the texts from Uruk have nothing to do with letters, historical writings, or religious literature. It took almost seven hundred years for these genres to appear. When such texts were written the priestess Enheduanna was among the first to compose them.

1.3 Mesopotamian Literature and Scribal Schools

Scribes may have started out as bookkeepers and accountants but over time they became advisors to kings and used the skills they learned recording sheep and grains that traded hands to compose triumphal inscriptions that lauded their patrons.[18] Some of the earliest examples are inscriptions on votive objects deposited in temples. Non-cultic historical narratives were also composed and used to legitimate the reign of kings.[19] Scribes linked the kings that paid their salaries with heroes of mythology, and religious figures praised temples through hymnody. Genres of writing grew and developed as scribes invented new forms of writing on their own as well as learning of

18 Jean-Jacques Glassner, *The Invention of Cuneiform: Writing in Sumer* (trans. and ed. Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 205.

19 Glassner, *The Invention of Cuneiform*, 212.

new styles from contact with other cultures. Stories became more complicated and new types of literature proliferated. The scribal arts became a lucrative profession.

Not only did forms of writing change but the languages themselves did too. The cuneiform writing system was originally developed in order to represent the Sumerian language that was spoken in southern Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium. In the third millennium Semitic peoples moved into Sumerian lands and subsequently they adapted the indigenous writing system for use with their language, Akkadian. But Sumerian was not entirely displaced. Although it eventually ceased being a spoken language, scribes continued to learn Sumerian and continued to recopy the traditional literature written in it. Furthermore, for a brief period (ca. 2100–2000) it made a comeback as the language of record for the Ur III empire established by king Šulgi. After Šulgi's empire collapsed Akkadian resumed its place as the lingua franca and Sumerian was again only employed as a written language for the learned. Yet scribes were expected to be competent in both Akkadian and Sumerian so that they could work in the language of politics and commerce, Akkadian, but also perpetuate the cultural texts predominantly written in Sumerian. Bilingual lists were used in schools in order to help apprentice scribes learn both languages but as time wore on the traditional stories of the Sumerians were adapted and merged with the traditions of the Semitic peoples who spoke Akkadian. Eventually Sumerian was no longer used.

One of the reasons why classical compositions, many of which were written in the dead language of Sumerian, survive to this day is because they were recopied for centuries by students who lived in Akkadian-speaking cities. These individuals went into a variety of jobs after they left the scribal schools – everything from land surveying to administration of animal husbandry to advising the king. Much like modern educational systems the scribal curriculum was graduated and contained a core body of knowledge that every student, no matter their future employment, was expected to master. If a student excelled in the introductory stages they could go on to "specialize" in certain areas of knowledge.[20] With knowledge comes power and scribal instructors recognized that, in addition to teaching students the technical skills of reading, schools should also cultivate a professional identity and ethic. A case in point is seen in the curriculum of the e.dub.a(k), literally "the tablet house" or scribal school, located in Nippur, the most important town for the religious life of Mesopotamia:

> The teaching of Sumerian in the Nippur eduba was not guided by the list of skills a future scribe had to master. The lack of attention to Akkadian and the overdose of high-brow Sumerian point in another direction. It seems

20 Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 213–217.

> that handing down the Sumerian language and tradition as completely as possible was considered to be all important. A pupil of the scribal school was introduced to the techniques of writing, but more importantly he was introduced to the heritage of Sumerian writing and Sumerian poetics.[21]

Poems, myths, hymns, proverbs, and laments – many of which were written in Sumerian – were used in the process of teaching students how to write so that they would learn wisdom, ethics, and a sense of their cultural and professional identity. These compositions were copied over and over again and their inclusion in the curriculum is one of the main reasons why they survive to this day.

Letters and prophecies had a far different life. Apart from generic templates that were used to teach students the basic formats of letters and reports, these were generally one-off texts. That is, they were not recopied over the centuries. Rather, they were used once for a specific purpose and possibly stored for a time if they were of particular importance. Occasionally, archaeologists have stumbled upon archives of this sort which were housed within cities that burned to the ground. While the flames consumed the buildings they baked clay tablets and preserved them for thousands of years. Another path of textual preservation was the garbage. Once scribes had practiced a text or a tablet had served its specific purpose, it was often thrown into a garbage heap or used as fill within construction. Many of the texts which modern scholars study were quite literally pulled from the trash.

1.4 Overview of Literary Periods in Mesopotamia

Just as scholars of English divide the history of English literature into periods such as Old English, Middle English, Renaissance, and so on, those who study Mesopotamia divide the literary activity of this area into a number of periods. This division typically involves three criteria: language, region, and time.

Sumerian was the first language that appeared in the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Accordingly, it became the equivalent of Latin for this region – learned people trained in this language and Sumerian texts were recopied for hundreds and hundreds of years. Yet, even in the third millennium it was on the wane and in the second it was dead, but had an afterlife in scribal tradition. For a brief period (ca. 2100–2000) a form of Sumerian was used within the administrative structures of the Ur III empire in southern Mesopotamia, but even at this time it was not a living language but a prestige language used for scholarship and religious ritual.[22]

21 Nicolaas Veldhuis, *Elementary Education at Nippur: The Lists of Trees and Wooden Objects* (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1997), 82–83.

22 Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon*, 43.

Table 1.1 *Dialects of Akkadian*

Old Akkadian, mid-3rd to beginning of 2nd millennium		
Old Assyrian	2000–1500	Old Babylonian
Middle Assyrian	1500–1000	Middle Babylonian
Neo-Assyrian	1000–600	Neo-Babylonian
	600 BCE–70 CE	Late Babylonian

As noted above, in the third millennium Semitic peoples from the area of modern Syria moved into Mesopotamia and adapted the system of writing Sumerian to their language. As their city-states grew in power so did the influence of their language, and by the second millennium Akkadian became the lingua franca from Iran to Egypt. However, Akkadian went through many changes and various regions preserved and developed different dialects. Mesopotamia can be divided into two geographic areas which were in constant competition with one another. The southern region, Babylonia, was regarded as an older culture, with a rich religious and literary history that was respected and preserved even by foreign colonial powers. The northern region, Assyria, conquered its southern neighbor on several occasions and from very early on had an international concern that expressed itself through the establishment of distant trading colonies and/or military conquest. Throughout most periods scribes from the northern and southern areas wrote in different dialects. In addition to the two major dialects of Assyrian and Babylonian, there were other dialects belonging to cities that were outside of the Mesopotamian heartland. Texts from cities such as Mari and Emar, which are located in modern Syria, and the Levantine cities represented in the el-Amarna correspondence, have their own particularities.[23] A general outline of the Akkadian language can be seen in Table 1.1, which arranges the dialects according to chronology and major region.[24]

Old Akkadian texts include mainly letters, economic transactions, royal inscriptions, legal texts, and just a few literary texts. Most of these works were written in the empire built by Sargon I, who ruled from the town of Akkad (also spelled Akkade) from which the language itself took its name. His empire lasted until around 2100, at which time it collapsed and was eclipsed by an expanding empire from the south.

Most of the texts from the Old Assyrian period are from trading colonies that the kingdom of Assyria established in Anatolia. Accordingly, their

23 Shlomo Izre'el, "The Amarna Glosses: Who Wrote What for Whom?" in *Israel Oriental Studies XV: Language and Culture in the Near East* (ed. Shlomo Izre'el and Rina Drory; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 101–122.

24 This chart is adapted from John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (Harvard Semitic Studies 45; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), xxiii.

Table 1.2 *Timeline*

Years BCE	Egypt	Levant	Mesopotamia	Iran
4000	Predynastic (urbanization; hieroglyphic script)		Uruk (Urbanization)	
3000		(sailing along Levantine coast)	(cuneiform script in the south)	(wheeled transport)
	Old Kingdom (Great pyramid at Giza)	(Kingdom of Ebla; Byblos trading with Egypt)	Early Dynastic (Old Akkadian; Old Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia)	Proto-Elamite
	(Egypt controls Nubia)		(Enheduanna)	Elamite
2000	Middle Kingdom (Pharaoh Tutankhamen)	Bronze (Canaanite city-states)	Old Babylonian/Assyrian (Laws of Hammurapi; Mari)	(King Untaš-Napiriša builds a ziggurat)
	New Kingdom (Upper and lower Egypt split)	(el-Amarna correspondence; Ugarit) Iron	Middle Babylonian/Assyrian	(Medes, Persians, and Parthians populate Iranian plateau)
1000	(Nubian king conquers Egypt)	(Jerusalem falls to Babylonians)	Neo-Babylonian/Assyrian (Assurbanipal's Library; Neo-Assyrian Prophets)	(Nebuchadnezzar invades Elam) Achaemenid (Cyrus the Great)
0	Late (Rosetta stone; Ptolemies)	(Maccabean revolt)	Late Babylonian (Selucids; Last cuneiform text)	

content is focused mainly upon business transactions. Old Babylonian texts include royal archives, myths such as the Gilgameš epic, letters, hymns, prayers, scholarly and medical texts, royal inscriptions like Hammurapi's Laws, omens, and economic documents. Old Babylonian is one of Mesopotamia's richest periods in terms of textual diversity.

Middle Assyrian and Middle Babylonian are two of the least attested dialects. There are letters, royal inscriptions, and economic documents from the Middle Assyrian period as well as fourteen tablets containing the "Middle Assyrian Laws." A few legal and economic texts, royal inscriptions, and inscribed stones that set out the boundaries of land grants appear in the Middle Babylonian period.

Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian are the most richly attested periods of Mesopotamian textual history. Virtually every genre is present and entire libraries have been discovered, such as that belonging to the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal in the capital of Nineveh.[25] Many significant literary compositions, such as Enuma Elish and the Gilgameš Epic, appear in this collection. The Neo-Assyrian oracles in this book were part of Assurbanipal's library. The Neo-Babylonian corpus is known for its huge numbers of legal and administrative documents detailing everything from prenuptial agreements to employment contracts involving circus performers.[26]

Late Babylonian represents the last group of texts written in Akkadian. Like Neo-Babylonian, most of them are letters or administrative documents. Mesopotamian scribes continued to write and recopy cuneiform texts even though Aramaic succeeded Akkadian as the lingua franca of the first millennium. Amazingly, writers of cuneiform continued their craft even after Greek superseded Aramaic as the dominant language of trade and commerce. Many of the last known cuneiform tablets are bilinguals with cuneiform on one side and Greek transcriptions on the other. The last known instance of cuneiform writing is a tablet involving astral observations that is dated to 75 CE.[27]

Lastly, Standard Babylonian was an unspoken dialect in which later scholars tried to imitate Old Babylonian. All of the literary texts of the late second and first millennium were written in Standard Babylonian.

25 Benjamin R. Foster and Karen Pollinger Foster, *Civilizations of Ancient Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 124–128.

26 For a sampling of these texts see Arthur Ungnad and Mariano San Nicolò, *Neubabylonische Rechts- und Verwaltungsurkunden* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich, 1935).

27 M. J. Geller, "The Last Wedge," *ZA* 87 (1997): 43–95.

CHAPTER 2

Mesopotamian Women

Describing women as a separate topic of study has its problems. Women are not a "special issue," but form half of the population. Furthermore, we face the obvious problem of scope: Mesopotamia covers a huge area, over a period of three thousand years, and there was considerable variation in the roles of women within this geographical and chronological framework. Additionally, textual evidence from Mesopotamia is very uneven. Some areas and time periods are very well documented but there are also huge gaps. However, we can begin to fill in some of these gaps with information from the archaeological record and iconographic evidence.

Despite these challenges, we felt it was necessary to give the reader some basic background information regarding some of the most salient features in Mesopotamian women's lives. Thus, the following identifies some features of women's lives which were – in most places and times – common denominators for them. In this chapter, we first outline women's position in society, followed by a discussion of women in and out of matrimony. Finally, elite women's lives in some specific periods and places are described.[1]

1 Several studies have been published regarding Mesopotamian women. In addition to those mentioned in the footnotes of this chapter, some of the most relevant and/or most recent volumes include: Mark Chavalas (ed.), *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Sourcebook* (Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World; London: Routledge, 2014); Julia Asher-Greve and Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Simo Parpola and Robert Whiting (eds.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the XLVIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002); Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (London: Routledge, 2001); Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was* (Case Studies in Early Societies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Barbara Lesko (ed.), *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia. Proceedings of the Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, November 5–7, 1987* (Brown Judaic Studies 166; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Jean-Marie Durand (ed.), *La femme dans le Proche-Orient Antique: XXXIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 7–10 juillet 1986)* (Éditions Recherche

2.1 Social Classes and Legal Position

On the whole, Mesopotamian society was divided into roughly three social classes: free, semi-free, and slaves. On one end of the continuum, the "free women" or "elite women" (Akkadian term *awīlātum*) were often mistresses of large households with servants and considerable economic responsibilities. On the other end were slaves. Slaves were owned by palaces, temples, and wealthy households. Throughout Mesopotamian history a varying percentage of the population was slaves. Some slaves were former free citizens who were forced into slavery by debts; some were war captives. A woman could be sold into slavery by her family, usually father or brothers, or even her husband. Another form of servitude was the pledging system in which a family member or a slave could be given to someone as a servant for a fixed term as a surety against a loan. If the borrower defaulted on the loan, the pledged person would then become the property of the individual providing the loan. In between elite women and female slaves (*amātum*) there was a class of semi-free or "subordinate" people in Mesopotamia, traditionally called *muškēnum* in the law codes. Scholars have had some difficulties placing this class in society outside the framework of the law codes. Apparently they were tied to their masters or the owners of the land that they cultivated but they were definitely not slaves.[2]

Very little is known about the lives of slave women or the women of the *muškēnum*-class, since written evidence mostly deals with the affairs of the wealthy. One needed resources to learn how to read and write or even to hire a scribe. Therefore, their voices are rarely preserved within the texts from Mesopotamia. Poor and slave women mainly appear within texts only as objects of trade.

Throughout Mesopotamian history women had the right to conduct legal transactions. They engaged in trade, lending and borrowing, and acquired property. It is very difficult to assess how freely they could do this. On the whole, women were probably under the jurisdiction of the male head of the family except for widows and some other special cases. However, this did not necessarily mean that they needed explicit male consent for every act. This is

sur les Civilisations; Paris: CNRS, 1987); and Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983). Additionally, see *NIN: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* (four issues, from 2000 to 2003).

2 See Samuel Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jack Sasson; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 469–484, esp. 475–478; Amélie Kuhrt, "Non-Royal Women in the Late Babylonian Period: A Survey," in *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (ed. Barbara Lesko; Brown Judaic Studies 166; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 215–239, esp. 230–235; and J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1994), 237–240.

particularly true for wealthy women, who had the means and status to act on their own.[3]

2.2 Marriage

Marriage was the common denominator for most individuals. In general, all men and women were expected to marry and have children. A woman lived with her family under the authority of her father until she married. Marriages were usually arranged by the fathers of the bride and the groom. Often the bride was considerably younger than the groom. Both fathers gave contributions for the new household: a dowry was supplied by the father of the bride and the family of the groom provided bride wealth. The marriage was completed in stages, possibly with a long engagement period. The marriage was finalized when the bride and groom moved in together. The aim of any marriage was to produce male heirs who would then take care of their parents when they aged. Divorce was not common but did happen in some cases. A husband could send his wife away and pay her compensation but it was a far more serious matter for a woman to leave her husband. Worst-case scenarios could include the wife being condemned to death through drowning or thrown off a tower, or she could be sold into slavery. A man could take a second wife in a few special circumstances (e.g., if the first one did not provide him with children) but women were never allowed to take more than one husband.[4]

All through Mesopotamian history people acted as members of a family, a clan, or an institutional household (*bītum*, lit. "house"). Women could work, for example, in the royal household, a governor's estate, or a temple. Often we know very little about the lives of women outside these institutions. Some of them might have joined these households while simultaneously keeping up their own families, while others might have dedicated

3 Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," 479; Kuhrt, "Non-Royal Women," 228–230; and Rivkah Harris, "Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?" in *Women's Earliest Records*, 145–156 esp. 146–149. For women and law, see Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004) and Sophie Lafont, *Femmes, droit et justice dans l'antiquité orientale: Contribution à l'étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 165; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

4 See Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 88–108; Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," 478–481; Marten Stol, "Private Life in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 485–501; Marten Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 2/4 (1995): 123–144; Kuhrt, "Non-Royal Women," esp. 225–228; and Martha Roth, "Marriage and Matrimonial Prestations in First Millennium B.C. Babylonia," in *Women's Earliest Records*, 245–344.

their lives to serving the institution, seeing their service as an alternative to marriage and children.[5]

Temples and palaces employed women as musicians, scribes, administrative personnel, and cultic professionals. In some cases these women lived in the palace or temple, but in many cases it would have been quite possible for them to have a house, a husband, and children elsewhere. The compensation they received for their work varied considerably. Many received food, clothing, and other items according to their rank as members of the institutional household. For example, the female administrators (*šakintu*) in the Neo-Assyrian palaces were wealthy and influential. Considering their extensive responsibilities in the palace, they may have lived there as well.[6]

At the other end to the professionals were the less fortunate women. In the early Sumerian institutions, and probably later as well, women formed a large work-force for physically demanding labor. They worked as weavers, ground flour, towed boats, and cut reeds. Apparently they received for their work half of the rations given to male workers. Women are also known to have worked as midwives, nurses, and tavern keepers.[7]

There were also groups of women who lived outside matrimony. This did not mean that they were independent, at least not in the modern, individualistic sense of the word. Most of them still belonged to a family or an institutional household. The extent of this belonging had great influence on their position.

Widows formed the largest group of women living outside matrimony. They were by no means a monolithic group. In the law codes widows and orphans were often portrayed as being especially vulnerable and in need of the king's special attention. Yet not all widows were economically vulnerable. For instance, a widow with under-age children could take control of her deceased husband's business and property and manage it until her son came of age. If there were no children and her father was still alive, the widow could also return to the house of her father. The widow did not usually inherit her husband's property, but she would keep her own possessions if her husband died. Such property could include her dowry as well as other gifts from her family. The main inheritance share regularly went to the eldest son. Other sons received smaller amounts. Unmarried daughters received a dowry from the estate, which functioned as a woman's inheritance share. The sons were expected to care for their mother in her old age. Thus a widow with enough property of her own could act fairly autonomously, whereas a poor widow without sons or male relatives to care for her

5 Most evidence for this comes from temples; see, e.g., on *nadītum* women (2.3 "Elite women").

6 Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 91–105.

7 Marc Van de Mieroop, "Women in the Economy of Sumer," in *Women's Earliest Records*, 53–66, esp. 63–66; and Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia," 137.

would have been in a difficult position. Remarriage was often an option and the procedure for remarriage did not necessarily involve all the stages of the first marriage.[8]

Additionally, prostitutes lived outside matrimony and apparently also without institutional affiliations. The general consensus among Assyriologists is that the Akkadian word for a prostitute was *ḫarimtu*, although Julia Assante has suggested that *ḫarimtu* did not actually refer to "a prostitute" but rather to "a single woman." According to her, the main qualification for *ḫarimtu* is that she was neither "a wife of a man" nor "a daughter of a man," i.e. she did not belong to a household with a male head of the family. Whether or not the *ḫarimtu* women were prostitutes, it seems that they too could be either rich and autonomous or, on the other hand, little more than slaves. Some of them probably owned the income they made and could have been rather independent in that sense.[9]

The eminent scholar Amélie Kuhrt has convincingly argued that women who had escaped regular masculine authority were considered dangerous for social order and even possible sources of evil witchcraft. Witchcraft was taken extremely seriously by Mesopotamians. People were believed to be vulnerable to all kinds of attacks by magical means. Misfortune which was caused by sorcery needed to be dispelled by a specialist who used "white magic" to counter the evil intent of the sorcerer. For the most part, sorcery was seen as a weapon of women, although male sorcerers are occasionally mentioned.[10]

2.3 Elite Women

Elite women are far better represented in the textual record than poor women. The most prominent elite institutions of Mesopotamia were the palace and the temple. Women could have considerable authority in both institutions. They served as heads of temples and on rare occasions as ruling queens.[11] The lives of

8 Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia," esp. 132–134.

9 Julia Assante, "The kar.kid/harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 30 (1998): 5–96, esp. 8–13; Jerrold Cooper, "Prostitution," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 11, no. 1/2 (2006): 13–21; and Harris, "Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?," esp. 149.

10 Kuhrt, "Non-Royal Women," esp. 238. For witchcraft see, e.g., Karel Van Der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman* (trans. Sara Denning-Bolle; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), esp. 113–116; and Yitschak Sefati and Jacob Klein, "The Role of Women in Mesopotamian Witchcraft," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 569–587; and Tzvi Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Ancient Magic and Divination 5; Leiden: Brill-Styx, 2002).

11 Debate on this is ongoing: see Kathleen McCaffrey, "The Female Kings of Ur," in *Gender through Time in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Diane Bolger; Gender and Archaeology 17; Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 173–215.

such women are occasionally very well known. The following five groups of women are especially well documented: the royal women of the Ur III kingdom (ca. 2112–2004), Old Assyrian merchant women (ca. 1900–1830), Old Babylonian *nadītum*-women (ca. 1880–1550), palace women of the Old Babylonian city-state of Mari (ca. 1810–1760), and the elite women of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (ca. 900–612). A short introduction is given here on these "clusters." More specific details can be found in the introductions to the texts.

The Sumerian third dynasty of Ur (Ur III) in southern Mesopotamia is known from more than 100,000 texts, most of which relate to the economy and administration of the realm. These documents show that women were participating in sanctioned power within all levels of society and formed an essential part of administrative structures of the kingdom. The queen and other high-ranking royal women had important duties in the palace and the cult. The household of the queen was a large and influential institution. The wives of many governors were also active figures. Especially well documented is women's involvement in textile production.[12] In this anthology the "Lullaby for a Son of Šulgi" (5.3.3) possibly originates from the Ur III period.

Most documents from the Old Assyrian period come from the trading colony in Kanesh in Anatolia, where the Assyrians had a permanent trading outpost, a *kārum*. Archaeologists have excavated a large number of cuneiform tablets recording lively correspondence between the men in *kārum* Kanesh and the women of the family who had stayed in the capital of the kingdom, Assur, over 1,100 km to the south. The trade mostly consisted of shipments of tin and textiles via donkey caravans to Kanesh, and silver and gold flowing back to Assur. The women sending textiles to Kanesh were actively engaged in the family's trading enterprises.[13] Some letters sent by these women are included in 6.2.

Much of the evidence from the Old Babylonian period regarding elite women relates to the *nadītum*-women. The priestesses were dedicated to a

12 Rita Wright, "Gendered Relations and the Ur III Dynasty: Kinship, Property, and Labor," in *Gender through Time in the Ancient Near East*, 247–279 and Van de Mieroop, "Women in the Economy of Sumer," esp. 57–63. Cf. Frauke Weiershäuser, *Die königlichen Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (Göttinger Beiträge zum Alten Orient 1; Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2008) and Weiershäuser, "Die bildliche Darstellung königlicher Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur und ihre sozialpolitische Aussage," in *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art* (ed. Silvia Schroer; Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 220; Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg, 2006), 263–279.

13 Amélie Kuhrt, "The Old Assyrian Merchants," in *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City* (ed. Helen Parkins and Christopher Smith; London: Routledge, 2005), 15–30. Cf. Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 years; Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 164–84 and Klaas Veenhof, *Aspects of Old Assyrian Trade and its Terminology* (Studia et Documenta ad iura Orientis Antiqui Pertinentia 10; Leiden: Brill, 1972).

male god: to Šamaš in the city of Sippar, to Marduk in Babylon, and to Ninurta in Nippur. In Sippar they lived within the *gagûm*-building complex, which is often translated as a "cloister." "Cloister" is not the best translation as these women were definitely not cut off from the world or only concentrating on religious matters, although the initiation to the temple resembled marriage. Mainly the term "cloister" has been used because these women did not bear children. Instead, they could give their husbands secondary wives to bear descendants. Most of our information comes from Sippar, which means that it does not necessarily reflect the lives of the *nadītum*-women in other cities.

At least in Sippar, the *nadītum* were wealthy women, often daughters of elite families. They were engaged actively in financial transactions, agricultural production as well as cultic duties. Some of them could even read and write. It seems that they were entitled to clothing, food, and oil from their families. There is evidence that after her death a *nadītum*-woman's property was inherited by her male relatives, but in some cases she could also will it to an outsider, for example to a slave or a younger *nadītum* whom she had adopted to take care of her in her old age.[14]

The Old Babylonian *qadištum* and *kulmašītum*-women, who also appear in the current volume, belonged to the same general class of women as the *nadītum*, although there is less textual evidence regarding them. The titles were connected to cult and these women could own property, like *nadītum*-women. However, unlike the *nadītum*, they could marry and have children. Apparently the *qadištum* had something to do with babies, in delivering them and/or wet-nursing them. There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that a *qadištum* might have been literate (see chapter 4). Furthermore, the *qadištum* and *kulmašītum* appear in the Old Babylonian letters of the *nadītum* (chapter 6).[15]

Another remarkable Old Babylonian source regarding women are the texts from the city of Mari, which was located in western Mesopotamia on the bank of the Euphrates. The texts found there mostly originate from a very short time period, from the reigns of two kings (ca. 1790–1745). Thousands of clay tablets have been excavated from the royal palace of Mari and they illuminate all aspects of administration and palace business during those years. It is clear that women were an integral part of state administration in Mari. When the king was away it seems that his queen even

14 Ulla Jeyes, "The Nadītu Women of Sippar," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt; London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983), 260–72 and Harris, "Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?," esp. 154–56. Cf. Elizabeth Stone, "The Social Role of the Nadītu Women in Old Babylonian Nippur," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 25, no. 1 (1982): 50–70.

15 Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, qedēša, qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *Harvard Theological Review* 82/3 (1989): 245–265. See also CAD s.v. *qadištu* and *kulmašītu*.

acted as a vicegerent. Secondary wives and other high-ranking women – such as the governor's wife – played significant roles as well. They organized cultic matters, sent oracles to the king, and took care of the smooth running of economic activities, for example textile production.[16] We have included some letters sent by the women of the royal palace at Mari (chapter 6) as well as some very interesting oracles delivered by female prophets who were located near there (chapter 8).

Neo-Assyrian women are also very well attested. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was huge, covering Mesopotamia from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, and even parts of Egypt at times. Thousands of Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablets have been found – mostly from royal palaces but also some temple and private archives are known. Regarding the royal women, we have numerous administrative deeds and documents, as well as letters, dedications and inscriptions. Neo-Assyrian queens clearly wielded considerable influence. As in previous times, their households were an integral part of the administration of the state. Some left such a lasting impression within cultural memories that their names were transmitted to the Greeks.[17]

In addition to queens and the female relatives of the king, also the "court women" (*sekretu*) lived in the palaces. There were many women working there as well, especially in the administration of the queen's household. There is some evidence that the queen's household might have been involved in large-scale textile production. Moreover, female musicians were employed in large numbers in Neo-Assyrian palaces.[18] The Neo-Assyrian temples are not as well known as temples in some previous periods, but prophets played a prominent role in Neo-Assyrian society and several extant oracles were delivered by female prophets.[19] In this

16 B.F. Batto, *Studies on Women at Mari* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Cf. Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV: La population féminine des palais d'apres les Archives Royales de Mari: Le harem de Zimrī-Lîm* (Mémoires de NABU 5; Paris: SÉPOA, 1999).

17 Some of their memories are clearly exaggerated or mythologized but this does not detract from fact that these women were tremendously influential in their lifetime and that their reputations were embedded within the traditions of Mesopotamia and beyond (Gerald P. Verbrugghe and John M. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001], 21–22).

18 For Neo-Assyrian musicians, see Sherry Lou Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home: Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society* (SAAS 21; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012), 29–54. Note that their role in palaces seems to have been quite different from the role of female musicians in Old Babylonian Mari (Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium marianum IX: Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari* [Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 10; Paris: SEPOA, 2007], 31–48).

19 On Neo-Assyrian women, see Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home: Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society*; Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015) and Sarah Melville, *The Role of*

anthology we have included letters by palace women (6.7), some inscriptions by Neo-Assyrian queens (chapter 7), the Zakûtu treaty (9.2.1), and prophetic oracles (chapter 8).

On the whole, the Mesopotamian evidence suggests that elite women acted in all the roles that men did, although considerably fewer women than men appear in writing from Mesopotamia. Women corresponded with men, with the king, with each other, bought, sold, loaned, borrowed, guaranteed debts and acted as witnesses, owned property, were involved in trading ventures, used seals, etc.

Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999). On the female prophets, see Martti Nissinen, "The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets" in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical and Arabian Perspectives* (ed. Martti Nissinen; *Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 13*; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 89–114.

CHAPTER 3

Authorship, Agency, and Gender

A few words regarding the gender system in Mesopotamia are in order. The terms "sex" and "gender" refer to, respectively, biological differences and culturally constructed identities such as "male" and "female."[1] More recent research on gender has suggested that such a strict dichotomy and a narrow understanding of "sex" and "gender" as uniform immutable categories might not be a useful tool of analysis. Instead, researchers should concentrate on how gender is created in interactions between individuals. It seems clear that such an idea is fruitful especially in studying Mesopotamia. There are very few texts from Mesopotamia that give us a window on Mesopotamian self-understanding of "female" and "male" but there are plenty of texts where individuals are seen in interactions with each other.[2]

Nevertheless, the little we know about the Mesopotamian gender system implies that it was a system with male and female gender roles. There are some hints which suggest that in addition to male and female gender other possibilities existed. Nonetheless, it seems clear that such roles were always marginal in the society.[3] For the purposes of this anthology, we accept the existence of a Mesopotamian gender matrix wherein most individuals belonged to male or female genders which were continuously performed and negotiated in interactions between individuals.

In this chapter, we will first discuss the problem of essentialism. In other words, what is our aim in publishing a collection of women-authored texts from Mesopotamia? Our main goal is not to identify "essentially female" features in the texts but to explore how the gender matrix of Mesopotamian society relates to the authorship of women. In practice, we will use the concept of agency to outline this intersection between authorship and

1 For a good overview of this discussion, see Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18–25.

2 Saana Svärd, "Studying Gender: A Case Study of Female Administrators in Neo-Assyrian Palaces," in *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel; Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records; Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2016), 459–470.

3 See, e.g., Saana Teppo, "Sacred Marriage and the Devotees of Ištar," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 75–92.

gender. Furthermore, authorship in Mesopotamia in general and women's authorship specifically is explored.

3.1 The Problem of Essentialism

When we started planning this anthology one of the thorniest questions was: Why exactly are we making an anthology of women-authored texts? How can we avoid the pitfalls of essentialism? Many scholars have been satisfied with describing the "essentially female" aspects of women's life,[4] which – while valuable – is not the end point of discussion and not always the most fruitful approach.[5] As the eminent anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo has written:

> To talk of women's status is to think about a social world in ultimately dichotomous terms, wherein "woman" is universally opposed to "man" in the same ways in all contexts. Thus, we tend repeatedly to contrast and stress presumably given differences between women and men, instead of asking how such differences are themselves created by gender relations. In so doing, we find ourselves the victims of a conceptual tradition that discovers "essence" in the natural characteristics which distinguish us from men and then declares that women's present lot derives from what, "in essence," women are, portraying social roles and rules as products not of action and relation in a truly human world, but of self-serving individuals who perform by rote.[6]

Art historian and Assyriologist Zainab Bahrani agrees with this sentiment as far as Mesopotamian studies are concerned when she criticizes the fact that women's history has often been concerned only with those subjects that are considered to be essentially female, such as child-rearing. In the end, this is often the way Western scholars see femininity when actually, "we are always dealing with historically specific forms of masculinity or femininity."[7]

Furthermore, women cannot be studied as a side-issue because biological differences between sexes are something that all human societies deal with, one way or another. In fact, more recent research on women's history has

4 See, e.g., Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 years; Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), where women's work as textile producers is discussed, or Marten Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 2/4 (1995): 123–144, focusing on "typically" female issues.

5 Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*, 8–9.

6 M. Z. Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 3 (1980): 389–417, esp. 401.

7 Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*, 8–9.

shifted focus from the study of women to the study of gender systems. In this line of thought, the main goal is not to recognize "essentially female" features in the texts but to explore how the gender matrix affected the authorship of women. As Martti Nissinen among others has stated, the gender system precedes cultural actions.[8] By using the approach that Nissinen has developed for the study of women's prophetic agency, this anthology gives us a chance to examine writing as one of the forums in which gender was constructed. More specifically, in line with the definition of gender presented at the beginning of this chapter, we are interested in outlining how the act of writing created gender.

3.2 "Agency" as an Alternative Framework

The concept of agency is formed in the triangle of power, individual, and society. The concept of power is far from simple, but concisely speaking the sociological views concerning the concept "power" can be organized under two general principles: as something that can be observed either in the structures of society, e.g., the tax system ("structural power"), or in individuals, e.g., in the actions of the tax collector ("individual power"). Understanding power as inherent in individuals has its roots in the Weberian idea of autonomy. To quote Weber himself, power is "the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."[9] Structural power, on the other hand, locates power in the formation of a society. Both views focus the attention of the researcher on hierarchical power relationships but scholars have often studied these relationships in isolation.[10]

Sociologist Anthony Giddens tried to reconcile these approaches. According to him, power refers to the individual's capacity to act, but at the same time it also refers to the structures present in society. Social institutions do not determine our actions even though they constrain us. Thus, structures of society are not a barrier to agency but a resource. This means that although action expresses the intentions of an individual, it – at

8 Martti Nissinen, "Gender and Prophetic Agency in the Ancient Near East and in Greece," in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho; Ancient Israel and Its Literature 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 27–58, at 38.

9 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 926.

10 For more information regarding this discussion, see Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 23–38.

the same time – reproduces the structures of society.[11] Laura Leming applied Giddens's insight in a fruitful manner in her study regarding religious agency:

> A sociological understanding of religious agency provides a means of examining the processes of structuration (Giddens 1984) as it is occurring in religious institutions. It provides a window on how individuals, by their choices and actions, give shape and form to the structures of society, including religious institutions, even as they participate in their ongoing, gradual transformation.[12]

Martti Nissinen has developed Leming's ideas further. He writes about prophetic agency as a "subspecies of the religious identity." Nissinen quotes Laura Leming in defining the religious identity:

> as a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity. As religious identity, it may include, but is not limited to, a received or an acquired identity, whether passed on by family, religious group, or other social entity such as an educational community, or actively sought. To constitute religious agency, this identity is claimed and lived as one's own, with an insistence on active ownership.[13]

Nissinen goes on to state that this definition includes both the received tradition and an active ownership. Thus, he understands prophetic agency as (1) instrumental and (2) independent. Instrumental agency relates to prophets as transmitters of the religious framework known to the audience whereas independent agency refers to their role as instigators of change.[14]

What is of interest for our anthology is that these ideas are applicable to the study of women authors as well. Women authors can be seen as exhibiting

11 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), 14–16, 25–26. We are aware that there are also other conceptualizations of power. For example, in the Foucauldian view power could be defined as a technique which is always also intertwined with resistance. Foucault's ideas on power, the concepts of negotiated power and heterarchical power, have been discussed in archaeology and Assyriology as well (Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*, 22; Carole Crumley, "Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies," *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6, no. 1 [1995]: 1–5; Janet Levy, "Gender, Power, and Heterarchy in Middle-Level Societies," in *Manifesting Power: Gender and the Interpretation of Power in Archaeology* [ed. Tracy Sweely; London: Routledge, 1999], 62–78 and Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, 147–159). Nonetheless, for this study, the Giddensian approach is the most suitable one.

12 Laura M. Leming, "Sociological Explorations: What Is Religious Agency?," *The Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2007): 73–92, esp. 74.

13 Leming, "Sociological Explorations: What Is Religious Agency?," 74.

14 Martti Nissinen, "Gender and Prophetic Agency in the Ancient Near East and in Greece," 37–38.

agency in the act of writing. On the one hand, they are transmitting a religious and/or cultural framework to the audience. This happens as they use the skills that they have learned from their scribal teachers and reproduce literary tradition, for example in copying a scholarly work. At the same time, on some occasions, we glimpse something that can be called independent agency, i.e. they create new literary tradition or new texts. For example, a female poet might compose a brand new piece. This approach of outlining women's agency is, in our opinion, a valid analytical tool for both literature and non-literature alike. In other words, this approach is useful not merely for analyzing the authorship of literary works but also for analyzing the authorship of administrative documents. However, we would like to emphasize that the division of agency into instrumental and independent categories is meant to clarify the way gender structures and authorship interacted and it is not to be taken as a definition of women's position and power.

In this anthology the concepts of instrumental and independent agency form the main conceptual categories for analyzing authorship. However, before we discuss this further, we must first consider the many possible ways of dividing Mesopotamian texts into genres. In our contemporary world we are avid classifiers of writing. Every book that is published is given a genre designation by its publisher and after it is released thousands of librarians all over the world will assign it call numbers which reflect, in part, its genre. Mesopotamian scribes also thought of texts in terms of genre but to a lesser degree than we do today. Although a full reconstruction of their conception of writing is not possible, it is clear that they did have categorizations for at least some types of writing.[15] For instance, many prayers contain headings or rubrics which include designations such as: *eršahunga* "lament to appease the heart (of a god)" and *šuilla* "lifting the hands," the latter being an incantation prayer which apparently included a gesture.[16] However, many compositions were not given a genre designation and we do not know if one existed for that type of writing or not. Most of the categorizations used in this volume are derived from classical

15 Piotr Michalowski rightly objects that assigning modern understandings of genre onto ancient texts fails to understand these writings on their own terms ("The Libraries of Babel: Text, Authority, and Tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Cultural Repertoires, Structure, Function and Dynamics* [ed. Gillis Dorleijn and Herman Vanstiphout; Leuven: Peeters, 2003], 125). We share this concern, yet we follow Benjamin Foster's conclusion that since too little is known about ancient typologies we may cautiously use modern categories to serve as reading aids (*Akkadian Literature of the Late Period* [GMTR 2; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007], 3).

16 For detailed treatments see Stefan Maul, '*Herzberuhigungsklagen', Die sumerische-akkadischen Eršahunga-Gebete* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988) and Werner Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen,"* (Studia Pohl: Series Maior 5; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976).

and modern literature, as is standard practice when ancient designations are unknown, but whenever an ancient classification is known it will be provided.

Coming back to our discussion of the concept of agency outlined above, we can say that authors of literary texts – for example lexical lists – for the most part exhibit instrumental agency in passing on the literary tradition. That is, they copied compositions that they received. On the other hand, non-literary texts – such as letters authored by women (whether written in their own hand or dictated) – highlight the women's independent agency, their competence in authoring new texts. No composition exhibits one or the other form of agency in its "pure" form, rather all texts are mixtures of both. Even the letters that women wrote were composed according to the styles and forms that were common in their day. In this respect writing a letter reflects instrumental agency while the act of generating the new and particular content for the letter is a form of independent agency.

3.3 Authorship and Women

The whole question of the authorship of Mesopotamian compositions is far from simple. We will discuss literary and non-literary texts separately. This divide is a modern divide: a convenient label, as it were. However, there is a rough correspondence to this divide in Mesopotamian conceptions of genre. Texts containing specialized scholarly knowledge or texts of cultural and religious significance, in other words text genres which we modern readers would often label as "literature," share certain distinct features. The original composers of these texts were rarely announced but the works were diligently copied by scribes, whose names were occasionally recorded at the end of the composition. These colophons were postscripts that recorded metadata for the tablet in question.

In many cases the scribe aimed at copying the literary work exactly as it was, thus embracing instrumental authorship. Furthermore, in many cases the name of the copying scribe is not even mentioned in the colophon. Thus, we often have little or no idea who the original author or authors of Mesopotamian literary compositions were. In fact, the overwhelming majority of literary documents are anonymous creations transmitted by anonymous copyists. Benjamin Foster explains this common lack of authorial attribution for literary works:

> Mesopotamian poetic tradition seems therefore to have had a clearly defined notion of individual inspiration and authorship, as well as of a pristine text that had not been added to or taken away from. Whereas modern literary tradition stresses the individual's importance as a matrix

> of creative impulse, Mesopotamian artistic tradition tended rather to stress the outside source of the inspiration.[17]

In other words, the situation that inspired a composition was important for its interpretation. A hymn designed for a specific liturgy would be performed by many people and not merely the singular author who composed it. Furthermore, if a composition was thought to have been given to the author as a gift from the gods, the importance of the individual who transcribed it was less, relative to the deity who imparted it. For these and other reasons the original authors of texts were often unattributed. In fact, Foster cites examples from a thousand-year span and suggests that there was a poetic tradition in Mesopotamia, "whereby the author might refer to the genesis, divine approval of, composition, authority, and traditing of his text."[18] These were the factors that lent credibility and value to his compositions, not the person of the author as such. Foster ends his article with an interesting speculation:

> The real significance of the absence of an author's name may lie yet deeper in recognition that performer, traditer, or auditor of the text play roles no less important than that of the author himself. . . . Just as the text is impossible without its initiating inspiration and its mediating author, so too it is impossible without its traditer and appreciative auditor. Authors in Mesopotamian civilization well knew and were wont to recall in their texts that composition was an ongoing, contributive enterprise, in which the author, or "first one", was present only at the beginning.[19]

Foster's observation also draws attention to a very under-researched topic in Mesopotamian literary studies: how much of the meaning of the text lies with authorial intent, and how much the meaning of the text should be constructed based on the actual *use* of the text. In any case, for literary texts, instrumental agency, transmitting the text onwards to the next generation, was of great importance.

As far as female authors of literary texts are concerned, Brigitte Lion makes an interesting point regarding the position of high-priestess Enheduanna as an author. While it is clear that Enheduanna was not the original author of all the texts attributed to her, neither were the kings original authors of their own inscriptions. Lion observes, "The essential point is that in antiquity unusual men, such as rulers, or a woman such as Enheduanna, exceptional because of her high birth and religious duties, could equally be *regarded* as authors" (italics ours). Furthermore, she points out the difficulty of knowing whether the senders of letter-prayers and

17 Benjamin Foster, "On Authorship in Akkadian Literature," *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 51 (1991): 31.
18 Foster, "On Authorship in Akkadian Literature," 30.
19 Foster, "On Authorship in Akkadian Literature," 31–32.

petitions were actually the authors, while at the same time noting that "both men and women were *supposed to be able to resort to writing* (directly or not) and to present highly elaborate requests to gods and kings" (italics ours).[20] We acknowledge this, and would like to observe that what this anthology presents includes:

1) what women actually wrote (often debatable)
2) what ancient scribes thought women wrote or should have written
3) what modern scholars thought women wrote or should have written.

In the introductions to each translation we indicate which of these three situations applies to the composition.

Moving on to non-literary texts, the main differences between literary and non-literary texts are the questions of authorship and audience. Unlike most literary texts, the authors of non-literary compositions like financial and administrative documents and letters were unambiguously mentioned. In many cases both the scribe who wrote the text down and the author who commissioned or dictated the text are mentioned. The audience of non-literary texts was targeted and their purpose was practical. The text was intended to serve the needs of a specific situation. Unlike literary texts, which were often recopied for centuries, non-literary documents were rarely even archived much less recopied and passed down to subsequent generations. We should note, however, that the divide between literary and non-literary texts is somewhat arbitrary, since many texts mix elements from both. A good example from the current volume is the letter-prayer (5.3.1), where the author addresses the gods in the form of the letter. Another well-known practice is quoting literature, such as proverbs, as part of the letter.

Whether we are studying literary or non-literary texts it is important to analyze the different ways authorship worked and was conceived of. In this anthology we have chosen a wide definition of "authorship." We have not only included most literary texts authored by women, but also have a selection of non-literary texts. The aim has been to illuminate the many modes of authorship in Mesopotamia that were available for men as well as for women.

We selected the compositions for this anthology following the principles of "authorship" discussed above. A four-square diagram illustrating these parameters will help the reader to understand our selection of texts and genres (see Figure 3.1). As you can see, we think of authorship as a continuum where *copying* (instrumental agency) is at one end and *creating new texts* (independent agency) at the other. In addition to this continuum, we also evaluate authorship on a more binary level: texts that are actually

20 Brigitte Lion, "Literacy and Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 90–91.

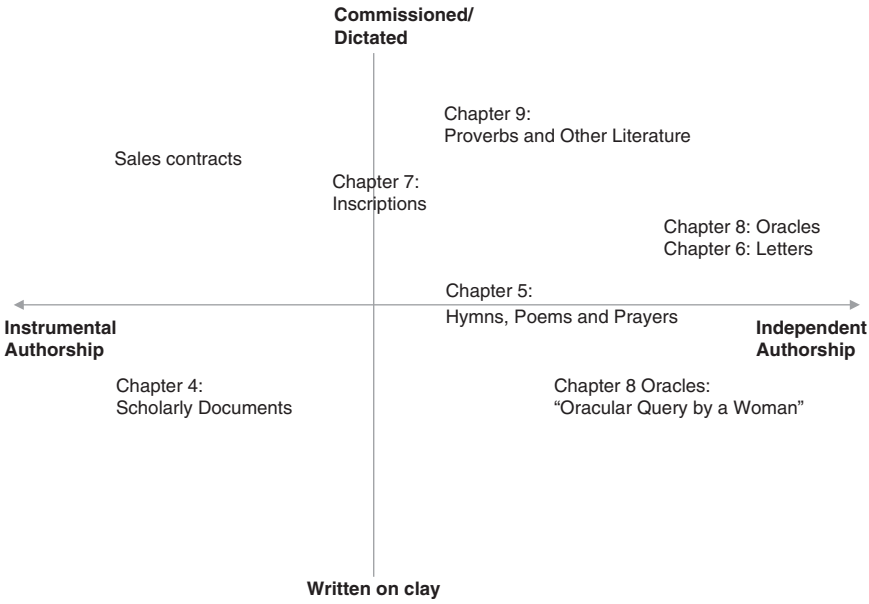


Figure 3.1: Text genres presented in this volume in relation to the framework of authorship

pressed on wet clay by women on the one hand and texts *dictated* or *commissioned* by women on the other.

We have placed the genres discussed in this volume in the diagram, admitting that in many cases there is an unavoidable degree of speculation. As you can see in Figure 3.1, letters are fairly high on the agency scale since they are original compositions, but most were dictated by a woman to a (presumably) male scribe. Sales contracts which were also dictated/commissioned can hardly be considered as reflecting independent agency since they were created according to a very standardized formula (although the particular content of the contracts varied). On the other side of the divide, school tablets where the colophon states that the text was written by a woman were certainly actually pressed on clay by a woman, but the gender of the original composer of the texts is not known. This picture is complicated when we consider the copies of texts that were attributed to female authors and which entered the scribal curriculum. The only copies of these compositions that now exist were physically produced by later scribes whose gender is unknown. It could be argued that Enheduanna herself both pressed the stylus on the clay and composed the text even though there is no clear evidence to prove this (see a more thorough discussion on the authorship of Enheduanna's hymns in chapter 5). For this anthology, we are utilizing almost the full complement of options present in Figure 3.1, only leaving

aside the dictated texts that show little independent agency (e.g., sales contracts). For the texts that were pressed on clay by women, but do not exhibit independent agency, we have chosen to include just one genre: scholarly texts.[21]

In the following chapters the short introductions for each text aim to make it as clear as possible which category the text in question belongs to. Additionally, we indicate when modern scholars postulate female authorship of compositions that are anonymous. In the introductions to the texts our aim is to outline why a text was attributed to a woman and what meaning the attribution holds from the perspectives of gender and authorship.

3.4 Female Scribes and Female Literacy

Finally, as a separate topic, we should discuss female scribes and literacy. Chapter 1 highlighted the activities in scribal schools in general. Here we will elaborate on the topic of female scribes and literacy in particular. The relationship between women and writing is long in Mesopotamia. As pointed out in a comprehensive article by Brigitte Lion, several goddesses were strongly connected with the art of writing, the Sumerian goddess Nisaba especially.[22] This is confirmed by Eleanor Robson, who in her analysis suggests that on an ideological level counting and writing in early Mesopotamia were associated with goddesses as well as legendary kings and "the self-effacing professional who ensures the smooth, fair running of households and institutions." Although she carefully notes that one cannot use the divine world as proof of everyday practices in Mesopotamia, she concludes in her article that "female scribes learned the standard student exercises, administered large households, and assisted in the maintenance of numerate justice: exactly what the images of goddesses in curricular compositions lead us to expect."[23] On a more general level, this discussion relates to the difficult question of how the texts that do not directly describe social reality attest to the role of women in Mesopotamia. Literary texts were often copied for hundreds of years and are not directly tied to a specific place or era. Even when we know where and when a piece of literature was composed, the primary focus of such texts is not to describe social reality. Simultaneously, however, literature necessarily reflects the society that gave birth to it.

21 However, the female scribes are briefly discussed in the next section.

22 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 91–92.

23 Eleanor Robson, "Gendered Literacy and Numeracy in the Sumerian Literary Corpus," in *Analysing Literary Sumerian: Corpus-Based Approaches* (ed. G. Cunningham and J. Ebeling; London: Equinox, 2007), 215–249, quotations 245, 247.

The oldest references to female scribes come from the Akkad and Ur III periods (ca. 2350–2000 BCE). As Samuel Meier pointed out, "there was no gender marking in Sumerian to distinguish women from men in occupations which both shared."[24] This makes it difficult to say how common female scribes were in these times. Explicit references to female scribes become more frequent in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1500 BCE), especially in the Mari palace and the temple in Sippar. However, being a scribe did not guarantee social or economic autonomy. At least on one occasion an Old Babylonian female scribe was sold as property.[25] After these occurrences, a "gap" of almost a thousand years appears, as the next instances of female scribes come from the Neo-Assyrian era. As Lion remarks, this "could be due to the accidents of source preservation, and to the lesser density of palace archives."[26] Nonetheless, there probably was a continuing tradition of training women scribes.[27] As far as we know, female scribes received the same training as male scribes and wrote similar texts as male scribes.[28] There is no apparent reason why this would cease to be the case during the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian period.

Lion suggests that female scribes existed to limit the contact between high-ranking women and men.[29] That is, that women were given scribal training in order to insulate elite men and women from each other. However, Samuel Meier notes that although women messengers and scribes acted mostly for or in the service of other women in Mesopotamia, "[i]n Mesopotamia, female scribes and messengers were continually confronting men, and it is consequently inappropriate to perceive the female world as an isolated entity, dialogically involved only with itself."[30] Thus, it seems to us that the existence of female scribes alone does not imply the segregation of women.

In addition to scribes there were other groups of people who might have known how to read and write. The kings, and to some extent the high officials (male and female), and the royal women form one group. Additionally, merchants and some part of religious personnel might have had the basic skills.[31] In fact, it is quite possible that in second- and first-millennium Mesopotamia many of the affluent elite learned the basics of the cuneiform writing system. As Simo Parpola has pointed out, one did not need to dedicate oneself to cuneiform studies for years in order to learn the most

24 Samuel Meier, "Women and Communication in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 3 (1991), 541.
25 Meier, "Women and Communication," 545.
26 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 99–101, 100.
27 Meier, "Women and Communication," 541–42.
28 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 100.
29 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 99 for Mari, 100 for *gagûm*, and 106 generally.
30 Meier, "Women and Communication," 545–546, quotation 546.
31 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 101–104.

common signs and logograms.[32] There were some so-called blue-collar workers who possessed a level of functional literacy. For example, two women attached to the royal kitchen at Mari recorded grain expenditures in the process of preparing food.[33]

It seems that women "had access to reading and writing that was comparable to men's in the ways they used them."[34] The real difference lies in quantities. The small number of texts authored by women can be explained by the "social uses of writing." In other words, most activities which required reading and writing were male-dominated fields.[35] As stated above, in this anthology a wide definition of authorship is used. This means that not only texts authored/written by women are included but also texts which are attributed to women authors either by ancient scribes or by modern scholars. In light of the evidence regarding female scribes and literacy, it seems clear that in addition to these texts there were numerous cuneiform texts written by women which are indistinguishable from texts written by male scribes because the documents do not contain attributions of authorship.

32 Simo Parpola, "The Man Without a Scribe and the Question of Literacy in the Assyrian Empire," in *Ana šadî Labnani lu allik: Festschrift für Wolfgang Röllig* (ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Hartmut Krihne, and Paolo Xella; AOAT 247; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 315–324, esp. 320–322; and Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon*, (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 64–67.

33 Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV: La population féminine des palais d'apres les Archives Royales de Mari: Le harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (Mémoires de NABU 5; Paris: SÉPOA, 1999), 91–92 and 106.

34 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 106.

35 Lion, "Literacy and Gender," 106.

PART II

The Texts

CHAPTER 4

Scholarly Documents

"Scholarly documents" denotes writing that was produced and copied for the use of scribes and scribal students. These texts were not intended for circulation within the community at large and would have had little relevance for people beyond the scribal guild. In most cases these documents were merely recopied by students and therefore can be seen as exhibiting instrumental agency. Apart from a few colophons added to the end of a small number of tablets containing lists, scholarly documents are anonymous. Within this discussion we distinguish scholarly documents from divinatory texts which were used by literate specialists in order to learn how to search and interpret sheep livers, examine the stars for signs of divine communication, discern the significance of birth anomalies, and so on. An individual needed a good deal of training in order to make sense of divinatory texts. Accordingly, only a subset of advanced students would have come into contact with them since they were not included in the general scribal curriculum. In any case, there are no extant divinatory texts that attribute their authorship to women but there are extant scholarly documents that were copied by females.

It took many years to gain proficiency in the cuneiform system of writing as well as to develop an understanding of the various types of writing that a scribe would be expected to work with. Occasionally, institutions sponsored scribal schools but in most cases they were private – a practicing scribe took on a few extra students as he was apprenticing his own children, for instance. Oftentimes the classes met outdoors, where there would be plenty of space and good light. The students were taught how to form tablets from clay and fashion styli from reeds. The lessons quickly progressed to the foundation that undergirded all scribal knowledge: lists.[1] Apart from simple syllabaries (the cuneiform equivalent of abecedaries) these lists can be divided into two types: sign lists and word lists. Sign lists were intended to teach students the values that a particular sign could take. Cuneiform signs were inventoried and paired with glosses that explained their meanings and most common uses. Word lists were slightly different. They were intended to take students

1 Niek Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Tradition* (GMTR 6; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014).

beyond merely learning to recognize particular signs; these lists were attempts at organizing the language, and in some cases, even knowledge itself. Word lists often arranged terms into thematic groups so that, for instance, all the words for trees or garments were listed together. Word lists could be monolingual (Sumerian only) or bilingual (Sumerian in one column with Akkadian analogues in a parallel column). Over time these lists gained a certain level of standardization throughout Mesopotamia. The terms proto, precursor, and forerunner are used within contemporary scholarship to indicate lists that were around before the more or less standardized versions came about.

Once students learned how to write a basic set of signs as well as their meanings and values, they copied templates of texts in order to learn the formats and genres of common documents. In some cases students might recopy a letter that was actually sent, but more often sample letters, as well as other texts that the students would be commissioned to write once they became professional scribes, were generated for the purpose of teaching. It was not uncommon for these templates to contain placeholders for personal names, e.g., "Mr. such-and-such gave Mr. such-and-such twelve sheep . . . " The students would memorize the structure of these texts and then insert specific names and amounts when commissioned to produce tablets for clients.

In most cases, scholarly texts did not exist in isolation. It would not make sense for a scribal school to have only one tablet. Students would need to learn from many types of texts and they would create numerous copies in the course of their education. While many of these copies were discarded, archives and collections of various types were kept all over ancient Mesopotamia. All of these archives were private, that is, there were no circulating libraries or literary depositories that were open for visitors to browse.[2] Rather, archives belonged to particular individuals, families, or institutions and were formed for specific purposes. For instance, families that had large commercial operations kept business records, kings preserved and collected texts that touched upon palace life, and schools maintained caches of curriculum texts.[3]

The texts we have included in this chapter contain colophons that specifically say they were produced by a female. There are undoubtedly other school texts that were written by women but that lack a colophon. Identifying them is a matter of speculation. In one such attempt, Lucille

2 Dominique Charpin, *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 37.

3 Such as the Murašû archive, Matthew W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 54; Leiden: Brill, 1985) and the royal archive at Mari, Daniel E. Fleming, *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–6.

Barberon suggests that some of the texts found in a house in Sippar were actually the archive of a *qadištu*-woman and her brother and that some of the school texts within the archive could have been written by the *qadištu* or her students. However, there is no evidence that this particular *qadištu* was literate. Barberon hypothesizes that she may have been since religious people sometimes were.[4]

Bibliography

For an overview of scribal learning and practice see Laurie E. Pearce, "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 4 (ed. Jack M. Sasson; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 2262–2278; on the place of scribal schools within Mesopotamian society see Andrew George, "In search of the é.dub.ba.a: The ancient Mesopotamian school in literature and reality," in *"An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing": Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein* (ed. Y. Sefati; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 127–137; and on the use of lexical lists within scribal education see Niek Veldhuis, "How did they Learn Cuneiform? Tribute/Word List C as an Elementary Exercise," in *Approaches to Sumerian Literature in Honour of Stip (H.L.J. Vanstiphout)* (ed. Piotr Michalowski and Niek Veldhuis; CM 35; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 181–200.

4.1 Syllable Alphabet A

Once students learned how to write the basic elements of a sign (for instance, vertical and horizontal strokes), they practiced this knowledge by copying lists that combined signs to make simple Sumerian words. Syllable Alphabet A was probably the first real list that scribal students copied. There does not seem to be a particular organizing principle or meaning to the list. In fact, the list itself appears to be a set "of basically meaningless syllable combinations" that functioned merely as a drill to help students learn to write signs.[5] And yet, there are some examples of Syllable Alphabet A which include parallel columns that list Akkadian equivalents. But as one scholar observed, the translations are not at all uniform and it appears that in producing them "the students had given a free rein to their imagination."[6]

Syllable Alphabet A appears within scribal curriculums all over Mesopotamia except for the city of Nippur, which used a different

4 Lucille Barberon, "Les documents d'archives des religieuses en Babylonie ancienne, Usage, transmission et conservation," in *Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilizations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* (ed. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet *et al.*; Lyon: Topoi, Supplément 10, 2009), 279–81.

5 Niek Veldhuis, "How Did They Learn Cuneiform?," 196.

6 Edmond Sollberger, "A Three Column Silbenvokabular A," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday April 21, 1965* (ed. Hans G. Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen; AS 16; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 22.

list, named by modern scholars Syllable Alphabet B. The particular tablet which we are treating in this book is fairly large (19 x 13.5 x 3.5 cm) and written in four columns, front and back. The colophon indicates that it was copied by a female scribe on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of Samsuiluna's fourteenth year (1736 BCE). It is not clear where the tablet was written. Similar syllable alphabets have come from Sippar, Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Isin, Kish, Tell Harmell, and Ishchali. Since there is no uniformity to the Akkadian translations of the signs in Syllable Alphabet A and due to the fact that it appears to combine syllables merely to help students practice writing and not to impart a particular meaning, we have refrained from offering an English translation and instead have transliterated the Sumerian signs. We have, however, translated the colophon.

Obverse			
column 1	column 2	column 3	column 4
1. me-me	1. nun-ni	1. kas-ni	1. an-kal
2. pap-pap	2. nun-ur	2. ni-ur-ba	2. tam-ma
3. a-a	3. a-ku	3. be-li_2	3. tam-tam-ma
4. a-a-a	4. kil-la	4. ĝiš-be	4. ug_4-ga
5. ku-ku	5. a-pap	5. nu-nu	5. ug_4-ug_4-ga
6. lu-lu	6. pap-a	6. a-nu	6. an-gar_3
7. maš	7. a-an	7. saĝ-an-tuk	7. gar_3-an
8. maš-maš	8. an-a	8. saĝ-kud-da-a	8. an-$aš_2$
9. maš-kak	9. kur-ba	9. saĝ-an	9. $aš_2$-an
10. maš-ni	10. kur-u-ta	10. saĝ-an-tuk	10. an-ba
11. si-kak	11. me-zu	11. saĝ-ĝu_{10}	11. an-ba-ni
12. si-ni	12. me-wa-zu	12. saĝ-kur	12. an-ni
13. si-a	13. i_3-zu	13. saĝ-kur-ta	13. an-ni-zu
14. u-bar	14. a-zu	14. kud-da-a	14. dug_3-ga
15. bar-bar	15. zu-zu	15. kud-da	15. dug_3-dug_3-ga
16. la_2-la_2	16. i_3-ba	16. gab-gab	16. me-dug_3
17. ši-bar	17. i_3-ba-ba	17. nin-gab	17. me-dug_3-ga
18. bar-ši	18. a-ba	18. nin-ezen	18. ši-ba-ni
19. ši-ši	19. a-ba-ba	19. nin-sukkal	19. ši-ba-ur
20. ši-ši-ši	20. ba-ba	20. nin-sukkal-an-ka	20. hu-hu
21. a-ši	21. ba-ba-a	21. pu_2-ta	21. hu-ba
22. a-ši-ši	22. ba-za	22. sila-ta	22. hu-ur

(*cont.*)

Obverse			
column 1	column 2	column 3	column 4
23. me-a	23. ba-za-za	23. e_2-ta	23. hu-ru
24. me-ni	24. ni-a	24. e_2-gud	24. an-u_2
25. aš-ni	25. a-ni	25. an-dul_3	25. u_2-a
26. aš-ur	26. tab-ni	26. an-an-dul_3	26. u_2-da
		27. an-ĝa_2	27. pa-pa
			28. pa-ĝa_2
Reverse			
column 5	column 6	column 7	column 8
29. pa-pa-ĝa_2	[not inscribed]	[not inscribed]	
30. a-a-ur			
31. an-ur			
32. ni-ni			
33. ni-ni-a			
34. ni-ni-ni			
35. ni-ni-ni-a			
36. ab-ba			
37. ab-ba-ĝu_{10}			
38. ab-ba-ni			
39. ab-ba-a			
40. ab-ba-uru_3			
41. igi-sa_{11}			45. Hand of a female scribe.
42. igi-sa_{11}-sa_{11}			
43. sa_{11}-sa_{11}			46. 13th day, 7th month;
44. sa_{11}-sa_{11}-a			47. Samsuiluna's 14th year.

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Veldhuis, "How Did They Learn Cuneiform?: Tribute/Word List C as an Elementary Exercise," in *Approaches to Sumerian Literature: Studies in Honor of Stip (H. L. J. Vanstiphout)* (ed. Piotr Michalowski and Niek Veldhuis; CM 35; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 181–200.

4.2 Proto a_2=A Lexical List

Proto a_2=A is a "precursor" of the lexical tradition of lists which aimed to teach basic signs to beginning students. This tradition was eventually standardized in the list known as Aa A=*nâqu*. Proto a_2=A is related to the sign list, Proto-Ea, which contained a series of Sumerian signs along with their phonetic pronunciation. Proto a_2=A is essentially the Proto-Ea list with the addition of Akkadian translations of the Sumerian signs.

This particular text dates to the Old Babylonian period and was probably written in Sippar, where there was a community of women living at the temple of Šamaš. This community was fairly large and required a good bit of administrative attention to run. It appears that the community depended upon its own members instead of outside scribes. Female scribes within the community likely passed on their craft to apprentices and a sort of school, either ad hoc or formal, may have existed there. The tablet is heavily damaged and only parts of columns 2 and 3 are legible but from what remains it is clear that it is a word list – Sumerian words to the left and Akkadian glosses on the right. The colophon indicates that a female scribe copied this list. Scholars have observed that the handwriting on this tablet resembles that on another tablet, upon which was written the "Hymn to the Hoe" (see 4.4).

Column 2

1′ [broken]
2′ [broken]
3′ to dissolve
4′ long lasting
5′ passage of time
6′ to become little
7′ to pluck
8′ to be late
9′ darkness
10′ to shine
11′ to complete
12′ to end
13′ good

Column 3

1′ iridescent
2′ red
3′ pink
[broken]

Colophon

[broken]
[broken]
The hand of Belti-reminni,
female scribe.

Bibliography

Text and translation: MSL 9, 148–49 and MSL 14, 135–6.
Studies: Brigitte Lion and Eleanor Robson, "Quelques textes scolaires paléo-babyloniens rédigés par des femmes," *JCS* 57 (2005): 38–39.

4.3 ur$_5$-ra=*hubullu* Lexical List

This heavily damaged tablet is from the lexical list ur$_5$-ra=*hubullu* which, in its "canonical" form, comprised twenty-four tablets and gave an encyclopedic list of Sumerian words and their Akkadian equivalents (there is a version of this list from Ugarit that is Sumerian–Hurrian rather than Sumerian–Akkadian). The part of this tablet that is legible comes from the section listing various items of clothing. Scribal students copied selections from ur$_5$-ra=*hubullu* in the first part of their training as they were learning the meanings of Sumerian signs. The colophon indicates that it was copied by a female scribe. The provenance of this tablet is unclear.

reverse, column 1′	reverse, column 2′
1′ hair [broken]	1′–5′ [broken]
2′ hair [broken]	6′ The hand of a female scribe,
3′ hair [broken]	7′ month of the cultic place, day 21,
4′ thin hair	8′ the year Samsuiluna the king
5′ robe	9′ [broken]
6′ thin robe	
7′ red robe	
8′ ceremonial garment	

(*cont.*)

reverse, column 1′	reverse, column 2′
9′ red ceremonial garment	
10′ thin ceremonial garment	
11′ tug_2-nig-$eren_2$-a-ak (battle garment?)	
12′ tug_2-a-ak (worked garment?)	
13′ tug_2-šu-a-ak (hand worked garment?)	
14′ tufted garment	

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Text: Jean-Marie Durand, *Documents cunéiformes de la IVe Section de l'Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes,* vol. 1: *Catalogue et copies cunéiformes* (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1982), text 495, plate 123.
Studies: Brigitte Lion and Eleanor Robson, "Quelques textes scolaires paléo-babyloniens rédigés par des femmes," *JCS* 57 (2005): 40–41; Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 48.

4.4 Hymn to the Hoe

After scribal students progressed through the process of learning the system of writing and they were acquainted with sign and word lists, it appears that they began copying literary texts in two stages. In the first stage they studied four royal and divine hymns and in the second they recopied ten examples of Sumerian literature. The "Hymn to the Hoe" was included among the ten texts that made up the second group.

The "Hymn to the Hoe" is a playfully constructed ode to the agricultural tool. It is built around a pun on the syllable /al/ – in Sumerian the word *al* signified the hoe but the sound "al" also appears within many words and as a grammatical element within phrases. This hymn plays on this and puts together a series of loosely related reflections on the role of the hoe within myths of the creation of the world, humanity, and various temples; allusions to Mesopotamian literature; and also descriptions of the uses of the hoe within daily life. Many of these jokes and puns remain mysterious to us. Nonetheless, this text, along with several others, indicates that although scribal education was a serious and daunting task, the scribal curriculum was infused with a good dose of levity and humor.

This hymn is attested in over ninety separate extant copies, of which about twelve seem to have originally contained the entire composition.

One of these tablets, which now survives in three pieces, appears to be written in the same handwriting as is seen in the Proto a_2=A Lexical List (4.2). For this reason, scholars often assume that the same female scribe who is mentioned in the colophon of the Proto a_2=A Lexical List was the same person who copied this version of the Hymn to the Hoe. Unfortunately, many of the lines on this tablet are heavily damaged and are only partly legible. In order to facilitate a pleasurable reading experience, we have not attempted to indicate where we have reconstructed this text from other tablets. However, we have indicated the places in which it is thought that this particular tablet deviates from the patterns seen in other versions of the hymn. In order to help the reader appreciate the word play that is at the heart of this hymn, we have marked with ⋆ all the words that contain the /al/ element or that rhyme with it.

Creation of the World lines 1–7

Not only did the lord make the world appear in its proper form
– the lord who never changes⋆ the fate he determines,
Enlil, who will make the seed of humankind⋆ come out of the earth –
not only did he hasten to separate heaven from earth,
not only did he hasten to separate earth from heaven,
but, to make it possible for humans to grow "Where Flesh Grows,"[7]
he first placed the axis of the earth at "The Bond of Heaven and Earth."[8]

In Praise of the Hoe lines 8–17

He did this with help from the hoe⋆ and sunlight broke⋆ out.
By distributing⋆ the work he established daily tasks
and for the hoe⋆ and the basket wages were established.
Enlil praised his hoe⋆,
his hoe⋆ wrought in gold and its top inlaid with lapis-lazuli,
his hoe⋆ whose blade was tied with a cord, was adorned with silver and gold,
his hoe⋆ whose edge was a plow of lapis-lazuli,
whose blade was like a battering ram standing up against a great wall⋆.
The lord accounted the hoe⋆, determined its fate
and put a crown upon its head.

The Role of the Hoe in the Creation of Humanity 18–27

Here, in "Where Flesh Came Out," he set this hoe⋆ to work,
he had it place the first model of humankind into the brick mold.

7 "Where Flesh Grows" is the name of a sacred area in Nippur where Enlil caused man to grow. It was thought to be the place where earth and sky were separated (A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* [Leuven: Peeters, 1992], 259).

8 "The Bond of Heaven and Earth," dur.an.ki, was located in the middle of the Nippur temple complex dedicated to Enlil.

Toward Enlil his nation* broke through the earth.

(This text omits line 21.)

The Anuna gods stepped toward him
and began* to bow before him.
They calmed Enlil with a supplication,
for they wanted to demand* the black-headed people from him.
The lady who had given birth to the lord, who had given birth to the king – Ninmena – started* off human reproduction.

Assignment of Tasks for Humans 28–34

The leader of heaven and earth, lord Nunamnir,
named the strong and valued* persons,

(one line is unintelligible)

and he recruited them to provide for the gods.
Enki praised Enlil's hoe*
and the girl Nisaba was appointed to keep a record of the decision.
They took* the radiant hoes*, the (ritually) pure hoes* into their hands.

The Ekur Temple in Nippur lines 35–42
The Ekur, the temple of Enlil, was founded by the hoe*.
By day it was forming*, by night it was making it grow*.
In well-founded Nippur, to the inner chamber of the Tummal* –
the Tummal*, the bread basket of mother Ninlil –
to the inner chamber of Tummal*, regular food deliveries were brought by the hero Ninurta into the presence of Enlil.
Holy Nininsina came into the presence of Enlil with
black goats and fruit offerings for the lord.

Abzu in Eridu lines 43–45
Abzu, with the lions in front of it, where the divine powers may not be requested,
the worker*, the good man, the lord Nudimmud,
was building* the Abzu after Eridu was chosen as the worksite*.

Ninhursaga's temple in Keš lines 46–48

The mother of the gods, Ninhursaga,
had "the mighty* light of the lord" live with her in Keš –Šulpaea, no less,
aided her with the building work*.

Eanna in Uruk lines 49–51
The shrine, Eanna, was cleaned by the hoe*

for the lady Eanna, the good cow.
The hoe★ is for ruin mounds; the hoe★ is for weeds.

Inanna's temple in Zabalam lines 52–55
In Zabalam the hoe★ is a (work)man for Inanna.
She determined the fate of the hoe★, with its jutting blade.
With her building work★, Utu was ready to help –
it is the famed building work★ of youthful Utu.

Nidaba's "Temple of Harmony" lines 56–58
The lady with expansive wisdom, Nidaba,
ordered the measuring of Eanna for building work★.
She designed the "Temple of Harmony" for building★.

The Other Gods and the Hoe lines 59–70
The king★ who has measured the hoe★ and spent★ the day in its tracks,
the hero Ninurta introduced within rebel★ lands working with the hoe.★
He subdues★ the city that does not obey its lord.
Toward heaven he roars★ like a storm;
toward the earth he strikes★ like a dragon.
Šara sat down on Enlil's knees
and he gave him what he desired:
he requested a stick, a club, a quiver and arrows, and the hoe★.
Dumuzi is the one who makes the "upper land" fertile★.
Gibil made his hoe★ raise its head to the heavens,
the hoe★ – the pure one – he refined with fire;
the Anuna were rejoicing★.

The Syllable /al/ is Found in All Spheres of Life lines 71–93

The temple of Geštinanna resembled a drum★,
the drum★ of mother Geštinanna has a beautiful sound.
The lord (Enlil) grunted at his hoe★ like a bull.
Regarding the grave★, the hoe★ puts people in the ground,
but hoe★ also brings the corpse up from the ground.
The hero honored by An, the younger brother of Nergal★,
the warrior Gilgameš, with the hoe★ he is a hunting net.
The son of Ninsun, with the oars★ he is preeminent,
with the hoe★ he is the great★ barber of the water channels.
In the innermost room of the shrine, with the hoe★ he is the minister★.
The wicked . . . are sons of the hoe,★
they are born in sleep from heaven.
In the sky, there is an *altiriku*★ bird, a bird of the god,
On the earth, there is the hoe★, a dog in the reeds, a dragon★ in the forest.

On the field of battle, there is the ax★.
On the wall, there is the net★.
On the table, there is the bowl★.
On the chariot, there is the sledge★.
In the stable, there is the cupboard★.
It is the hoe★! Its sound is sweet; it occurs in the hill country★ –
the tree of the hill country is the Allanum★ oak.

(line 93 is omitted from this tablet)

The Role of the Hoe in the Creation of Civilization lines 94–106
The hoe★ makes everything flower; the hoe★ makes everything flourish.
The hoe★ is good barley; the hoe★ is a net.
The hoe★ is a brick mold; the hoe★ made people exist★.
The hoe★ is the strength of youth.
The hoe★ and basket are the tools for building civilization.
It builds★ the right kind of house; it cultivates★ the right kind of field.
You, hoe★, extend★ the fertile land.
The field that fought★ its owner★,
the field that has not submitted★ to its owner★,
the hoe★ makes it yield to its owner★.
It chops the heads from the weeds,
it rips them out by the root, tears off its stalk,
the hoe★ makes the fibrous weeds yield★.

Doxology lines 107–109
The hoe★, the tool whose fate was fixed by father Enlil,
the hoe★, praised and renowned,
to the praise of Nisaba.

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CHAPTER 5

Hymns, Poems, and Prayers

Most of the tablets from Mesopotamia are pedestrian – receipts of commercial transactions, routine court documents, administrative records, and lists of various sorts. As in our society, only a very small portion of the texts created in the ancient world were what we would call "literature," or writing of esthetic value. Of this small corpus, one woman was responsible for collecting and/or authoring some of the most significant compositions.

Enheduanna was the daughter of Sargon I, king of Akkad, who created a vast empire in the twenty-fourth century BCE. Sargon expanded the kingdom of Akkad, which was in the northern region of Mesopotamia, to include the southern kingdoms of Sumer. Sargon was Semitic and a native speaker of Akkadian and once he placed the lands of Sumer under his control he switched the official language of these areas from Sumerian to his native tongue. This caused a great deal of animosity within the southern regions and Sargon made efforts at conciliation, at least as much as an occupying force can without giving up hegemony. One of these attempts was the installation of his daughter as the high priestess of Ur, one of the most significant holy sites of the south. Upon assuming this position she took the Sumerian name, Enheduanna, which means something like "Priestess, adornment of the Sky (or, the sky-deity, An)." Her name given at birth was in all likelihood an Akkadian one but it is unknown.

Enheduanna moved from her father's palace to Ur and lived in the *gipar*, the official residence of the priestess. She officiated at rituals, supervised the extensive temple complex, and likely functioned as a diplomat of sorts on behalf of her father when secular leaders visited the temple. A significant body of work was attributed to her, some of which survives to this day and all of which is included in this anthology. Her extant writings are mainly religious poetry – hymns centered around temples and stories about deities. Enheduanna is not only the first attested female author in world history but she is the first non-anonymous author that we know of, male or female. Enheduanna died while in office and was likely buried outside of the *gipar* within her own shrine. During festival times the shrines of previous priestesses were honored with offerings of cheese, butter, dates, and oil.

This chapter begins with Enheduanna's temple hymns. Hymns, as opposed to many other types of texts, had a metrical structure and ancient

scribes often categorized hymns according to the musical instruments that accompanied them. Hymns were given labels that related to the content of the composition, for example "harmony hymns," "hymns of heroism," and "communal laments."[1] Hymns exhibit aspects of both instrumental and individual agency. They were recopied within scribal schools, which reflects instrumental agency, yet hymns were also composed and/or compiled by individuals who were often noted within or at the end of the the compositions. The latter, as is the case with the hymns attributed to Enheduanna, are examples of individual agency.

Hymns were also embedded within larger compositions such as myths like *Enuma Eliš*, which describes Marduk's ascension in the pantheon, literary texts, royal inscriptions, and annals.[2] They also appeared as independent works which was the case with the hymns included in this anthology. The hymns presented here are of two types: temple hymns and hymns dedicated to the goddess Inanna. The temple hymns are addressed to the major sanctuaries of the southern alluvial plain and recount the splendor of each shrine.[3] Also included are three hymns that were dedicated to the goddess of love and war, Inanna.

The setting in which these hymns were used is often unclear since, in many cases, hymns do not include instructions. It is likely that some hymns, such as those that are embedded within larger compositions, were not used within religious liturgies but were literary creations. However, many hymns were used within religious services both public and private. Even though hymns themselves do not always include instructions, there are tablets that describe religious liturgies. For example, a tablet from the palace of the city-state Mari gives the instructions for the "Ištar Festival," which include the names and order of hymns that were to be sung.[4]

While Enheduanna's work makes up the core of this chapter, additional literary compositions include love poems, lullabies, and a letter-prayer. They are attributed to women who, like Enheduanna, were of royal and/or priestly lineage: Inannaka may have been the daughter of the high priest of Enlil, Nin-šatapada was both a princess and priestess of the city of Durum, Abi-šimti was the wife of Šulgi, king of Ur, and finally, Kubatum was the wife of Šu-Sin, king of Ur.

1 Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 69.

2 Alan Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns* (Ancient Near East Monographs 3; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 56–57.

3 J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1994), 26–27.

4 Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium marianum IX: Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari* (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 10; Paris: SEPOA, 2007), 56–63.

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5.1 Temple Hymns

The Temple Hymn composition is a collection of forty-two hymns written to the deities of thirty-six separate cities. Together the hymns express a vision of the lands stretching from the southernmost marshlands to the capital of the northern region, Akkad, united together in similar religious commitment. The deity Enlil was venerated by both the northern and southern cultures and, within this compilation (5.1.2), may have served as a lynchpin bringing together these lands in common devotion. The Temple Hymns may have originally functioned as propaganda – northern occupiers portraying themselves as patrons of the religious culture of their southern subjects while at the same time highlighting or inventing commonalities between the two parties.

The hymns are centered around the concept of **me**, typically translated as the divine "essence" or "being." We have translated this term as "divine presence" to more explicitly highlight the idea within most ancient religions that deities inhabited the shrines that were dedicated to them, and more particularly, the deities indwelled the images of the gods and goddesses that were housed within their temples. These deities had special relationships with the places surrounding their holy sites. If the deity was happy, the city and outlying fields prospered. If the deity was upset, the citizenry would experience struggle. In addition to this, each deity had their own sphere of influence within the cosmic order. For example, Asarluhi influenced incantation and magic (5.1.10) and Ningišzida (5.1.15) oversaw the underworld. In order for these deities to effect the spheres under their control in beneficial ways, they had to be placated and continually served gifts of food and drink.

The colophon at the end of this composition states that Enheduanna was the "compiler" of this collection. Whether she was the original author of these texts or whether she merely assembled them is hard to tell. It is also

unclear whether she herself was actually involved in the generation of this document or whether later scribes linked her to these hymns long after her death. Most scholars think that she did have a formative role in the composition of these hymns but that, similar to almost every literary text in the ancient world, later additions were included as the text was recopied. Regardless of whether or not Enheduanna herself wrote these compositions, later authors believed she did.

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5.1.1 The House of Enki at Eridu (lines 1–24)

The first hymn celebrates the temple in the city of Eridu which, according to the *Sumerian King List*, was the first city that was established "after kingship descended from heaven." While Enlil was regarded as the head of the pantheon at the time of the hymn's compilation, Eridu was the primordial city and its patron deity, Enki, whose name means "lord of the earth," was regarded as the creator god. Enki's temple was called the Abzu, which refers to underground aquifers of fresh water. Within the temple there was a tank of water which represented the primordial waters in which Enki lived before humans were created.

By placing this hymn first, Enheduanna grounds this series of hymns in creation itself. When read with the second hymn, it also seems that Enheduanna intended to highlight the similar beliefs regarding the creation of the world that the northern and southern kingdoms shared. However, the direct conflict between these two hymns – the first states that Eridu is the foundation of heaven and earth while the second puts Nippur in this role – did not concern her. It seems that at times the ancients did not place as much weight upon consistency within their religious stories as we often do today.

O Ziggurat-house, grown from heaven and earth,
foundation of heaven and earth, the great table of Eridu.
Abzu, shrine built for its prince,
House-of-the-holy-mound, where pure food is eaten,
watered by the prince's pure canal,
a mountain, a pure land cleansed with soap,
Abzu, your drum belongs to the cosmic forces.

Your great wall is in good condition.
The sun does not shine in the meeting place where the deity is,
the great meeting room, the meeting place, the good place.
Your precisely built house is sacred and has no equal.
Your prince, the great prince, a pure crown
he established for your holy area, O Eridu, as a crown for your head,
making thorn bushes grow, pure thorn bushes for the priest.
O *Abzu*-shrine, your place, your great place!

At the place where the Sun god is called upon, bringing
bread to eat, upon your ziggurat,
a magnificent shrine stretching toward heaven,
at your great oven equaling the greatness of your eating hall,
your prince, the prince of heaven and earth . . . cannot be changed,
. . ., the creator, . . ., the wise one,
. . ., the lord Nudimmud,
O House-of-*Abzu*, he built a house in your holy area and took a seat
upon your dais.

23 lines: The House of Enki at Eridu.

5.1.2 The House of Enlil in Nippur (lines 25–38)

The next six hymns (5.1.2–5.1.7) celebrate the shrines in the area of Nippur, the most holy city of the Sumerian lands. The first of these is dedicated to Enlil, the head of the divine pantheon. Both Nippur and Eridu claimed a connection with the earth's origin: Eridu was thought to be the place where heaven and earth were separated while Nippur was the point where heaven and earth met. Enheduanna includes both of these primordial cities at the beginning of the series, seemingly embracing both of their claims as legitimate. Furthermore, since both Nippur and Eridu were under her father's control, this subtly implies that Sargon is the legitimate, divinely appointed ruler of both Sumer and Akkad. Sargon began his reign as the king of Akkad and then extended his rule over an alliance of cities in the south. This hymn lends religious support to Sargon's new empire by saying that Nippur is its center. In ancient perspective, one viewed the world by facing east. From the vantage point of Nippur, Sumer would be to the right and Akkad to the left. From religious and political viewpoints, Nippur was the place where the northern and southern kingdoms were joined. It was the center of the world. A world that Enheduanna's father controlled.

O . . ., shrine where fate is determined,
. . ., foundation, raised by a ziggurat,
. . ., residency of Enlil,

your . . ., your right and your left are Sumer and Akkad.
O House of Enlil, your interior is cool, your exterior determines fate.
your doorjamb and your beam are a high mountain,
your projecting gate-tower is a glorious mountain.
your . . . is a princely holy area,
your base brings together heaven and earth.

Your prince, the great prince Enlil, the good lord,
the lord of the boundary of heaven, the lord who determines fate,
O shrine of Nippur, great mountain of Enlil,
he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

13 lines: The House of Enlil in Nippur.

5.1.3 The House of Ninlil in Nippur (lines 39–47)

In two Sumerian myths Ninlil romantically pursues Enlil and they end up marrying. Ninlil becomes the queen and the mother of the temple complex of Ekur, or the Mountain House, over which Enlil presides. Tummal, Ninlil's temple within the Ekur complex, was the site of a prominent new year festival. During these celebrations grain that had been stored throughout the year was distributed. Ninlil's shrine was also called the Ki-ur, "Great Place." Nunamnir was another name for Enlil.

O Tummal, greatly worthy of exalted divine power, producing fear and awesome radiance.
Foundation, your pure cleansing extends over the *abzu*.
Primeval city, reed bed with old reeds and new stalks,
your interior is a mountain of abundance and constructed from plenty.
During the month of the new year festival you are finely adorned
as the great lady of Ki-ur and equal to Enlil.
Your princess, mother Ninlil, the beloved spouse of Nunamnir,
O House of Tummal, she erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Ninlil in Nippur.

5.1.4 The House of Nusku in Nippur (lines 48–60)

Nusku, the god of fire and light, was one of Enlil's counselors. It was at his temple that the river ordeal took place. This was a juridical procedure in which an accused person, usually a suspected sorcerer, was thrown into a

river. If the person survived they were regarded as innocent but if they drowned it was presumed that they were guilty and Nusku had exacted his verdict.

O House of Terrifying Radiance, raising up awesome fear,
magnificent shrine, to which princely radiance was sent from heaven,
storehouse of Enlil, founded for the primeval radiance, of fitting nobility,
lifting your head in magnificence, counsellor of Mountain House,
the pillar, your house . . . the holy area with heaven.
Decision place of great judgement, the river ordeal,
let the righteous live and encircle the hearts of the evil with darkness.
In your great place worthy of pure cleansing and the rites of the incantation-priest,
you dine with lord Nunamnir.

Your prince, the prince who counsels Enlil, worthy of the magnificent shrine,
the demon of Mountain House, the supervisor Nusku,
O House of Enlil, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

12 lines: The House of Nusku in Nippur.

5.1.5 The House of Ninurta in Nippur (lines 61–76)

Ninurta was Ninlil's son. He was depicted as a fearsome warrior and was connected to the sun. One of the major festivals in his honor was the beginning of the plowing season.

O House Which Gathers the Divine Power of Heaven, standing in a great place,
the just divine power which the hero . . .,
strength of war, youthful mace, carrier of the quiver,
strong and mighty brick, your foundation is eternal.
Founded by the primeval lord, with noble and divine decision,
holy dust filling the mountain, lifting your head among the princes,
magnificent house, enchantment emanating from you is like the sun's spreading brilliance.
House of . . . Divine Power, your name Enlil has endowed with fearsome luminosity.

Your prince, the great . . . the hero whose strength has no limit,
the great governor for Enlil, the nobleman who is worthy of heaven and earth,
the seal-bearing executor(?) for father Enlil, completes the great divine ordinances,
the . . ., the leader for father Enlil,

the preeminent, the lion coming from the Great Mountain,
who destroys the foreign enemies, the lord Ninurta,
O House of Ninurta,[5] he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

15 lines: The House of Ninurta at Nippur.

5.1.6 The House of Šuziana in the Gagimah at Nippur (lines 77–86)

Šuziana was Enlil's second wife.

O House, Structure with a Mound, . . . raised head,
crown of the heavenly steppe, holy place, pure place,
O House, your foundation is a great, princely tower.

Your lady singlehandedly keeps the structure and dais provisioned,
O Singular Mound, brightens your area in nobility.
Your lady avoids emotional outburst and is keenly discerning,
the noble daughter flourishes along with the great mountain,
Šuziana, the junior wife of father Enlil,
O Singular Mound, she erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

9 lines: The House of Šuziana in the Gagimah.

5.1.7 The House of Ninhursaga in Keš (lines 87–100)

The goddess Ninhursaga oversaw life and death, particularly the birthing process, as well as undomesticated animal life. She is associated with an omega-shaped sign representing the womb. The city of Keš has not been located but it was likely near Adab which was between Tello and Nippur. Nintud is another name for the mother goddess.

O exalted Keš, form of heaven and earth,
causing fear like a great horned snake.
House of Ninhursaga, built in a fearsome place.
Weighty Keš, your interior is vast, your exterior is towering.
Great lion, lying(?) in the heavenly steppe and roaming the steppe,
great mountain, set in place through incantations,

5 The precise meaning of E_2-šu-me-$ša_4$ is unknown; see A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temple of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), §1065.

interior lit by the light of evening in which the moon does not shine,
that Nintud made beautiful,
O House of Keš, your brick, your patterning,
your terrace, exterior is a lapis-lazuli crown – your construction!

Your princess, the completely silencing princess, the great and righteous lady of heaven,
when she speaks heaven shakes, when she opens her mouth she utters a storm,
Aruru, the sister of Enlil,
O House of Keš, she erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

13 lines: The House of Ninhursaga in Keš.

5.1.8 The House of Nanna in Ur (lines 101–118)

The next five hymns (5.1.8–5.1.12) celebrate the temples surrounding the city of Ur. Ur was also the place where Enheduanna lived as the high priestess of the moon deity Nanna. Nanna was the firstborn son of Enlil and Ninlil. Nanna presided over the task of marking time, since the moon had such a large role within Mesopotamian calendars, delineating the beginning and end of months. This hymn mentions the temple's foundation reaching to a depth of 50 *abzu*, which likely represents the journey that Nanna made each month to the underworld for three nights when the moon is dark.

O Ur, bull standing in the wet reeds,
Ekišnugal,[6] calf of a great cow, . . . light of pure
heaven,
bull, snare laid in a nest,
Ur, basket feeding all lands,
shrine in a pure area, earth of An,
House of Sîn, at your front a prince, at your rear
royalty,
your cultic meal with music, your great holy table
with various drums.[7]
The light emanating from you and your true
kingship is extraordinarily valuable.

The *gagûm*-building, noble shrine of holy divine presence,
shines like the . . . sun,

6 The meaning of E_2-kiš-nu-gal_2 is uncertain; see A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temple of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), §653.

7 The šem$_5$ and $^{kuš}a_2$-la_2 drums are mentioned here.

Ekišnugal, moon light emanates into the land,
the wide midday sun fills all places.
O house, your area is a great snake, a snake marsh.
Your foundation reaches the *abzu*, fifty in number, and *engur*, seven in number,[8]
your shrine which looks into the heart of gods.
Your prince, the decision-making prince, the crown which spans the heavens,
the king of heaven, Ašimbabbar,[9]
O shrine of Ur, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

17 lines: The House of Nanna in Ur.

5.1.9 Šulgi's House Which is a Hill in Ur (lines 119–134)

At the end of this hymn the reader is told that these lines are "extra," indicating that this hymn is a later addition. This corresponds with the fact that Šulgi, king of Ur, lived several hundred years after Enheduanna's death. After his death, Šulgi attained divine status and the divine determinative was often used with his name. Whether or not he was considered a semi-divine figure toward the end of his life is uncertain.

O House with a Splendrous Name, a mountain extending to heaven,
its holy trench – your great foundation – is extremely valuable.
Its interior full of noble divine presence, from which a shining sun emanates,
a shrine with your rear to the blue sky, your inviting entrance to everyone[10]
in the land it functions as a binding agreement and a singular path.
Splendrous river with an open mouth your channel of divine presence roams,
your base is greatly awesome, a righteous mountain grew in a wide place.
Your splendrous dwelling place – a splendrous thing – of totally magnificent divine presence,

8 *Abzu* and *engur* were terms signifying cosmic underground waters as well as the ritual waters that represented them.

9 ^{d}Aš-im$_2$-babbar-e is another name for the moon god. Its meaning is uncertain but could possibly be something like "The white that roams alone."

10 Two figures of speech in this line have been rendered in English differently than they are structured in Sumerian. The first, the color sig$_7$-ga signified the spectrum from green to yellow and the second, igi ed$_2$-zu, means literally, your extending face, and was used to describe the temple entrance. In contemporary Western culture we tend to interpret the color of a normal sky as blue and to see building entrances as inviting people in rather than extending out to them. We have adjusted the idioms in order to make better sense in the target language.

. . . loud noise,
house of joy, your holy area makes the settlements happy.

O house, your prince Šulgi made it great and most noble.
. . . complete and splendrous, the strong and great wind,
embellished with divine presence, determining destiny,
O House Which is a Hill, Šulgi of An,
he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

15 lines – extra ones: Šhulgi's House Which is a Hill in Ur.

5.1.10 The House of Asarluhi in Kuara (lines 135–146)

Asarluhi was the deity behind magical powers and incantations, abilities he acquired from his father, the wise Enki. Asarluhi's temple is not named in this hymn; rather the city itself, Kuara, is mentioned.

O city, . . . from the *abzu* like barley,
rainy steppe, accepting the divine presence from its interior,
Kuara, to the foundation of your righteous sanctuary,
the lord goes in wonder not turning away his gifts.
The Seven Sages have expanded it from the bottom to the heights.

Your prince, the extremely valuable prince, Asarluhi, the valuable man,
the top dog, born a noble hound, a young lion seizing prey,
a storm surge pounding against an upstart land,
as long as they are not compliant he spits on them.
Asar-alim-nuna, son of the *abzu*,
O house Kuara, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

11 lines: The House of Asarluhi in Kuara.

5.1.11 The House of Ningubalag in Ki-abrig (lines 147–157)

Ningubalag is the son of Nanna and the brother of Asarluhi. Nanna is the patron of cattle and one of his nicknames was the "bull-calf of a great cow." Ningubalag, like his brother Asarluhi, had magical powers and, like his father, was associated with herds of cattle.

O House with Numerous Unblemished Oxen where its king sits on holy, precious stone,
splendrous trap, headgear of the noble son,

its best fine oil is pure and well made,
Chamber of Bowls, pure cattle pen pasturing with licorice plants,
your prince is a great wild bull, an elephant rejoicing in its strength
a wild cow sprouting horns and rejoicing in its radiant horns.
The incantation priest using a different language makes clouds gather in the sky,
the storm roaring in the sky making rain like the sunlight that strikes the earth,
Ningubalag, son of Nanna,
O Ki-abrig, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: House of Ningubalag in Ki-abrig.

5.1.12 The House of Nanna in Gaesh (lines 158–168)

The temple at Gaesh provided a temporary home for Nanna as he processed from his temple at Ur during the Akitu festival. The Akitu festival was a celebration of the equinox which took place in the first and the seventh month. Priests loaded the image of Nanna into a boat and transported it down a canal starting from his temple in Ur and ending at the temple at Gaesh. Three days later Nanna returned to Ur and took up residence once again at the Ekišnugal temple. Ašimbabbar is another name for Nanna.

O shrine, great and noble house set down at a cattle pen,
small lustrous city of Sîn,
Pure Warf, your interior is an exalted place, your foundation is pure and clean.
Shrine, your *gagûm*-building is founded with ritual purity,
your door is made of strong copper founded in a great place,
O noble roaring cattle pen, you raise your horns like a bull.
Your prince, the lord of heaven stands rejoicing,
at midday . . .,
O Pure Quay, Ašimbabbar,
erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Nanna in Gaesh.

5.1.13 The House of Utu in Larsa (lines 169–178)

Utu, the sun god, was the son of the moon deities, Nanna and Ningal, and the fraternal twin of Inanna. There were two prominent temples dedicated

to him – one in Larsa, which was 10 km east of Uruk in the southern plain, and another in the northern city of Sippar.

O house which comes from heaven, gleaming in Kulab,
shrine of the White House, white bull,
extend your neck to heavenly Utu.
Your brilliant horns, protruding from your head, are shiny and precious;
a lapis-lazuli beard hangs down . . .
Your prince, the exalted sun, lord of true speech,
who illuminates the horizon and illuminates the sky's zenith,
Utu, king of the White House,
O House of Larsa, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

9 lines: The House of Utu in Larsa.

5.1.14 The House of Ninazu in Enegir (lines 179–186)

Ninazu was a god associated with the netherworld. The small town which housed his temple, Enegir, was connected to Larsa by means of an irrigation canal. Ereškigala, mentioned in this hymn, was the "great lady" who ruled over the realm of the dead. Gudua is a synonym for the underworld.

O Enegir, great channel, channel to the underworld of Ereškigala,
Gudua of Sumer where all of humanity gathers,
Long House, in the land your shadow has stretched over the nobility of the land.
Your prince, seed of the great lord, the priest of the great underworld, born of Ereškigala,
nobly plays his lyre, sweet as the sound of a calf,
Ninazu who hears the words of prayer,
O House of Enegir, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

7 lines: The House of Ninazu in Enegir.

5.1.15 The House of Ningišzida in Gišbanda (lines 187–197)

Ningišzida, the son of Ninazu, was associated with the realm of the dead along with his father. This hymn describes the netherworld as a place from which no one escapes and also as the place from which the sun rises as it

makes its way around the earth. Ningišzida's temple was located in Gišbanda, between Lagaš and Ur.

O ancient place, skillfully set deep in the mountain,
chapel, fearsome place lying in a pasture,
with radiant and magnificent ways that no one can comprehend,
Gišbanda, neck stock, mesh net, trap of the great underworld from which no one escapes,
a restored exterior that is tall, like a trap,
your interior, a place where the sun rises, yielding widespread plenty.
Your prince is a prince who extends a pure hand, the holy one of heaven,
hair, abundant and thick, falls down the back of lord Ningišzida.
Ningišzida, O Gišbanda,
erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Ningišzida in Gišbanda.

5.1.16 The House of Inanna in Uruk (lines 198–209)

Uruk was located up the Euphrates from Ur. It was one of the oldest and most significant of the southern cities. Inanna's temple, built almost a millennium before Enheduanna was born, dominated the skyline. Inanna was one of the most prominent deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon. She was the goddess of love (sex) and war. Inanna's temple complex was referred to as Eanna, the House of Heaven.

O house with the great divine presence, Kulab . . . its holy area makes the great shrine flourish.
Fresh green fruit, wonderful and ripe,
descending from the interior of heaven, a shrine constructed for the bull,
House of Heaven, house of seven corners, seven fires lifted at night,
seven vigilant desires,
your princess is on the pure horizon.

Your lady, Inanna, . . .
an ornament for women, covers men with a turban,
crowned with lustrous desire, the dragon of Ningar,[11]
queen of heaven and earth, Inanna,
O House of Heaven, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

11 lines: House of Inanna in Uruk.

11 Ningar (nigin$_3$.gar) was the name of a chapel that was sometimes included within the temples of Inanna and Nininsina (Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* [Groningen: STYX, 2000], 29).

5.1.17 The House of Dumuzi in Badtibira (lines 210–220)

According to the *Sumerian King List*, a document that mixes together historical dynasties with mythic prehistoric rulers, Dumuzi was a human king who reigned in Uruk before a great flood. Over time he was elevated to the position of Inanna's spouse. A sacred marriage ceremony was celebrated in Uruk at the beginning of spring. Dumuzi and Inanna's coupling was thought to produce new life after winter. The city, Badtibira, "Fortress of the Smiths," was southeast of Uruk near Larsa.

O house where lustrous plants are spread upon the flowery bed,
bed chamber of pure Inanna,
the place where the lady of the steppe rests.
House of Holy Area, with brickwork fancy and pure, expertly set clay,
for those tending ewes on the heavenly steppe,
your wall, O House Which Is the Netherworld, stretches toward heaven for the shepherd.
Your prince, a prowling lion on the steppe, jewel of the Holy Woman
who is pure and holy of breast, the lord, husband of pure Inanna,
Dumuzi, king of House of Holy Area,
O Badtibira, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Dumuzi in Badtibira.

5.1.18 The House of Ninšubur in Akkil (lines 221–229)

Within a myth recounting Inanna's descent to the underworld, Ninšubur served as Inanna's trusted assistant. Ninšubur may have been equated with Ereškigala, Inanna's sister, since the two are interchanged in at least one deity list.[12] Within this hymn, she is described as an overseer of Inanna's temple. The city of Akkil, "Lamentation," is thought to have been located near Uruk.

O House Your Face is Mighty, abundance comes from your interior,
your storehouse is a mountain of abundance.
House, your fragrance is of a mountain of grape vines.
A loyal overseer is a leader in heaven.
House, your princess is preeminent among the gods,
a loyal overseer of House of Heaven who holds a pure scepter in her hand.
Ninšubur, loyal overseer, of House of Heaven,

12 Gebhard Selz, *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagaš* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1995), 132.

O House of Lamentation, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Ninšubur in Akkil.

5.1.19 The House of Ningirim in Murum (lines 230–239)

Petitioners often included the goddess Ningirim within incantations associated with healing and purification rites. She was thought to bring health to the sick and cleanness to the impure. The city of Murum is thought to have been located to the south of Badtibira.

O city, set upon a dais at that *abzu*, established for the priesthood,
house where incantations are recounted to heaven and earth,

(The next four lines are highly broken.)

. . . consecrated water in pure heaven and on holy earth.
Ningirim, lady of the bright consecrated water,
O House in Murum, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

9 Lines: The House of Ningirim in Murum.

5.1.20 The House of Ningirsu in Lagaš (lines 240–262)

Lagaš was about 22 km east of Uruk, northwest of the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was a large city-state that controlled an extensive surrounding region. Ningirsu's temple, Eninnu or "House of Fifty," was located in the neighboring city of Girsu. Within Mesopotamian thought most deities were associated with numbers; fifty was Ningirsu's. Ningirsu was a fertility god often represented by the plow. Similar to Inanna, Ningirsu was also linked to warfare. The Anuna gods were a group of primordial offspring of the sky god An. The Anuna gods were associated with fertility and judgment.

O House of Fifty, right hand of Lagaš, foremost in Sumer,
the eagle which looks toward the mountain,
the weapon of Ningirsu . . . all the lands,
strength of battle, the furious storm which rains on people,
to the Anuna – the great gods – giving strength of battle,
the pure brick mound where fate is determined, beautiful mountain,
your canal . . .
the gate to Pure City,
wine is poured into beautiful An's vessel sitting under the heavens.

What enters cannot be equaled,
what goes out cannot be destroyed.
. . ., fearsome facade, house of radiance,
place where decisions are made, lord Ningirsu
spreads it with great, awesome brilliance.
The Anuna gods appear at your great drinking festivals.
Your prince, a furious wind which destroys cities in hostile lands,
your king, a fearsome ox who shows its strength, a fearsome lion who smashes heads,
top dog who plots kingly strategy,
triumphs in kingship,
powerful, the big top dog in battle, lord without rival,
son of Enlil, lord Ningirsu,
O House of Fifty, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

22 lines: The House of Ningirsu in Lagaš.

5.1.21 The House of Bau in Girsu (lines 263–271)

Bau, the spouse of Ningirsu, was regarded in some myths as the means by which An created humanity – humans came from the area of her temple. This hymn mentions outcomes of the river ordeal being decided by Bau from within her temple (compare this to 5.1.4, "The House of Nusku in Nippur"). A collection of sixteen hundred tablets found within the temple complex gives evidence of extensive economic activities under the auspices of the Bau temple: agricultural cultivation, herd management, fishing, manufacturing of textiles, wood and metal working, leather crafts, and foreign trade.[13]

O Pure City, multiplying shrine of pure An, called a good name,
in your interior is the river ordeal which cleanses the righteous person.
House of Expansive Counsel, storehouse treasuring up silver and lapis-lazuli,
House That Cuts All Bonds, from where decision and divine presence go forth, where the hero pays homage.
Your princess, the thoughtful princess of the land, mother of all places,
the lady, the great doctor of the black headed who determines the fate of her city,
the first daughter of pure An, the young woman, mother Bau,
O Girsu, she erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Bau in Girsu.

13 Kazuya Maekawa, "The Development of the É-MÍ in Lagaš During Early Dynastic III," *Mesopotamia* 8–9 (1973–1974): 77–144.

5.1.22 The House of Nanše in Sirara (lines 272–282)

Nanše was known as the goddess of the sea. She also was influential in the interpretation of dreams. Sirara was the name of the temple complex at Lagaš.

O house, wild cow . . .
city of noble shine made up for the princess,
Sirara, great and noble place,
your wall (?) near the shrine,
your lady, Nanše, a great storm, strong tsunami,
born on the sea shore,
who laughs at the foam of the sea,
who plays with the flood water,
. . ., Nanše, the . . . lady,
O house, Sirara, she erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Nanše in Sirara.

5.1.23 The House of Ninmarki in Gu-aba (lines 283–293)

Ninmarki was regarded as the daughter of Nanše which accounts for the similar language used to describe the two goddesses as well as imagery of the sea used within this and the previous hymn. Gu-aba was a sea port for the state of Lagaš.

O House Which Stretches Over the Midst of the Sea, built in a pure place,
Gu-aba, your interior gives birth to everything, it is a well-built storeroom.
Pure shrine, wild cow for whom everything is unceasing,
your princess, Ningagia, the magnificent housekeeper . . .,
mighty . . . of father Enlil,
who takes counsel with lord Nunamnir,
born in . . . in the waves of the sea,
. . . like her . . . father tax-collector of the pure sea,
O house Gu-aba, holy Ninmarki
erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Ninmarki in Gu-aba.

5.1.24 The House of Dumuzi-abzu in Kinirša (lines 294–302)

Dumuzi-abzu was a relatively minor deity. Her name means "good child of the deep waters." Kinirša seems to have been located in Lagaš.

O House of Kinirša, suitable for its lady,
. . . beautiful mountain rising beside the ziqqurat,
house . . . a place of ringing joy,
house, your princess is a storm, riding on a lion . . .
raising a pure song, a harmonious song, singing with a great voice,
child of a righteous wild cow, nourished by the pure breast of a mother
who produced her,
O shrine Kinirša, Dumuzi-abzu
erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Dumuzi-abzu in Kinirša.

5.1.25 The House of Šara in Umma (lines 303–314)

Umma was located in central Mesopotamia in the midst of relatively fertile grasslands. The cities of Zabalam, Adab, and Isin (see 5.1.26–30) were located within the region controlled by Umma. In the myth of Inanna's Descent to the Underworld the deity Šara brushes Inanna's hair and paints her nails. Šara is said to have been Inanna's son; his father, however, is unknown. Šara is called the "pure shepherd" and was the patron deity of the city of Umma.

O House with Beautiful Bowls placed under heaven,
exalted table, fulfilling requests,
plenty in the midst of the sea . . .
. . . pure . . . there is prayer and joy.
the Magnificent House, House of Šara, the righteous man
enlarged with plenty.
Your house, Magnificent House, your prince, noble son, is never ill,
but is always an area of plenty and well-being.

. . . the sight of a wild cow,
Šara, . . . a good thing, the son who gave divine presence to his mother,
O House of Umma, he erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

11 lines: The House of Šara in Umma.

5.1.26 The House of Inanna in Zabalam (lines 315–327)

Inanna, whose Akkadian counterpart was Ištar, was the daughter of the moon god, Sîn. She was often represented as an eight-pointed star and was associated with Venus. Inanna was thought to open the gates of heaven for the moon and the sun to begin their procession across the sky. This corresponds with

Venus's irregular orbit, in which the star rises before the sun in the east and then appears at dusk in the west.

House Clad in Splendor, adorned with precious stone,
great aura, a building belonging to pure Inanna,
to which divine presence – righteous divine presence – was lavishly apportioned,
Zabalam, shrine of the mountain of precious stone, shrine of . . . dawn,
where voiced wishes are granted,
your righteous table, never failing a wish, she established.

Your mistress, Inanna . . . the singular woman,
the dragon who speaks a hostile word to . . .,
a radiant thing, brilliantly shining as she attacks a rebellious land,
through whom the sky's vault is made beautiful in the evening,
great daughter of Sîn, pure Inanna,
O house for the land of Zabalam, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

12 lines: The House of Inanna in Zabalam.

5.1.27 The House of the Iškur in Karkara (lines 328–351)

Iškur was the god of the rain. He was thought to have received his power from Enki, the god of fresh water. As a weather deity, Iškur had the power to destroy as well as to give life. Both of these aspects are reflected in this hymn.

O House bearing radiance like a great lion,
each day skillfully delivering decisions for those on the high plain,
House of Iškur, at your entrance is plenty, at your rear is joy.
Your foundation is a horned bull, a lion.
Pure staff, heavenly teat with rain for flax,
the tower of your house is a bull with heavy horns,
. . . foundation, your wall rises
. . . dense cloud
. . . snake,
. . . moon,
Ishkur, a consuming flood,
. . . a south wind with seven north winds
. . . sweeping north winds
. . . running from . . .
splits . . . mountain, diorite, stone and . . .

(two lines missing and one line completely broken)

. . . seed of the land,
the prince, the canal inspector of heaven and earth,
. . . living, numerous people,
. . . Ishkur,
O House of Karkara, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

23 lines: The House of Ishkur in Karkara.

5.1.28 The House of . . . in . . . (lines 352–362?)

This fragmentary hymn appears between those dedicated to temples in Karkara and Adab. Both of these cities lie on a tributary of the Tigris and it is likely that the temple that is the subject of this hymn was located between them. If this is true, the city of ŠEŠ-DU_3-a, which served as a resupply point for boat travelers, is a likely candidate.

O . . . bolt founded by An,
. . .
. . . heaven and earth . . .
. . . Enki . . .

(approximately 5 lines are missing or broken)

[. . . erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.]

[10? lines: The House of . . . in . . .]

5.1.29 The House of Ninhursaga in Adab (lines 363?–378)

In addition to being the patron of the city of Keš (5.1.7), Ninhursaga was also the chief deity of Adab. Adab was located on one of the most prominent irrigation canals, the Iturungal. The deity, Ašgi, mentioned toward the end of the hymn was Ninhursaga's son.

(first three lines are missing or broken)

An has . . . your holy area.
Exalted House, complete house, appropriate for its lady,
your entrance bears a grand aura, your interior is filled with radiance.
Mother Nintud, Enlil, and Enki have determined your fate.
Joyous House . . . the life of the black-headed,
the great divine presence, An has given you from the interior of heaven,
the pure treasury supplying your shrine (?),
Ninhursaga, as in Keš, supplies it well.

Great house of divine presence, heap of purity, cleansing brightness,
Ašgi, the god of Adab,
at Adab, O House Standing Beside the Canal,
O House of Adab, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

15 lines: The House of Ninhursaga in Adab.

5.1.30 The House of Nininsina in Isin (lines 379–395)

Nininsina was associated with medical healing. She was the daughter of An and Nintud. Nintud was often identified with Ninhursaga of the previous hymn (see also 5.1.39). At the time in which this hymn was written, Isin was a fairly minor city. It rose to prominence several hundred years later when it became a powerful part of the Isin-Larsa kingdom around 2000 BCE.

O Isin, city founded by An which he built in the middle of a flat place.
Its entrance is exalted, its interior skillfully composed,
its divine presence is a divine presence whose fate was determined by An,
a low dais which Enlil loves,
a place where An and Enlil determine fates,
a place where the great gods eat,
great fear and awesomeness is heaped up.
All the Anuna gods attend your drinking fetes.
Your princess, the mother, the priestess adorned with precious stones,
the one who supplies the building, the pure place,
who puts the crown on the priestess,
the one making the seven breasts flow for the cultic workers,
gifting them with seven wishes.

Your lady, the great doctor of the land,
Nininsina, daughter of An,
O House of Isin, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

16 lines: The House of Nininsina in Isin.

5.1.31 The House of Numušda in Kazallu (lines 396–406)

Kazallu's location is not known. However, since it is grouped near Marda it was probably situated nearby. Numušda was the son of the moon god, Nanna.

O Kazallu, your holy area in the midst of the sky,
shining . . . an admirable thing.
Your prince is the progeny of a bull . . . born of a wild bull,
. . . magnificent, multicolored eyes, lord with lion teeth,
catching a calf in its claws,
catching the . . .,
catching the . . .,
. . . giving strength to the . . .,
O Threshold of the Mountain, the great lord Numušda,
in Kazallu, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Numušda in Kazallu.

5.1.32 The House of Lugal-Marda in Marda (lines 407–415)

Marda was located on the Euphrates to the East of Nippur. Little is known about the deity Lugal-Marda apart from his identification with Ninurta (see 5.1.5).

O House which is the Eye of the Land, your foundation is founded,
a growing mountain becoming wide,
the enemies' territory . . .,

(3 lines are broken and 1 is missing)

. . . erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Lugal-Marda in Marda.

5.1.33 The House Ištaran in Der (lines 416–424)

The cities Der and Ešnunna (5.1.34) were north of the cities previously mentioned in this hymn and east of the river Tigris. The area was at the junction of major trade routes over both land and water. Ištaran was often depicted as a snake. He was thought to punish those who transgressed societal laws, in particular, violating the limits of boundary stones.

O Der, seeking great decisions . . . speaking judgments,
at your fearsome and radiant gate,
a viper and a snake are caught in a trap.
Your prince, an expert among gods,
suited to give advice and lustrous speech,
son of Uraš, thoroughly knows the righteous divine presence of nobility,
Ištaran, the . . . king of heaven,

O House which is the Great Tower of the Land, erected a
house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Ištaran in Der.

5.1.34 The House of Ninazu in Ešnunna (lines 425–447)

Ninazu, as we saw in 5.1.14, was a deity of the underworld. In this hymn he appears as a fighting lion, a dragon, and a storm that devours the enemy.

O Pure House, whose pure divine presence exceed all lands,
whose name is high and exalted, magnificent dwelling of a hero,
Shining House of Ninazu, house of shining divine presence,
House, your divine presence is pure, your cleansing is a bright cleansing,
at this dwelling the hero cools off.
On your heap Ninazu dines.
Your king, the great lord, son of Enlil,
clever lion, spitting poison on enemies,
bellowing like the south wind against hostile lands,
roiling like a dragon against the walls of rebel areas,
a storm covering the disobedient and trampling the enemy.
When he goes out, no evil-doer can escape.
When he enacts victory, the rebellious cities are destroyed.
When his brow wrinkles, their people are thrown to the dust.
O House, your prince is a great lion from whose paws enemies hang.
Your king is a monstrous storm, a furious martial wind,
in battle . . . with a shield on his majestic arm,
a net spread over the people which the enemy cannot escape.
When the great lord appears his magnificent is unequaled.
Righteous progeny born of the Great Mountain and Ninlil,
O Pure House, your king, the hero Ninazu,
O Ešnunna, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

22 lines: The House of Ninazu in Ešnunna.

5.1.35 The House of Zababa in Kish (lines 448–456)

According to the *Sumerian King List*, after the cataclysmic flood, kingship descended from heaven and rested upon Kish. Zababa, a warrior deity that claimed Inanna as his wife, was the city's patron deity.

O House Built in Abundance, Kish, raising its head amidst the noble divine
presence,
inhabited place, your great foundation cannot be scattered,

your platform is a wide, ominous cloud floating in the middle of the sky.
Your interior is a weapon, a divine weapon embellished with . . .
Your right hand makes mountains shake, your left thins out the enemy.
Your prince – exalted and magnificent – is a great storm brought to earth, imposing fear and great terror,
O Storage House, your king, the hero Zababa,
O House of Kish, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Zababa in Kish.

5.1.36 The House of Nergal in Gudua (lines 457–467)

Nergal was a god of both the underworld and war. He was often represented with a staff topped with two lion heads. Nergal's temple in Gudua was an important site for religious rites involving the dead.

O House which is the Bond of the Land,
bull, noble . . . among the gods,
fearsome wild bull, bull causing lament,
Gudua, your harbor is a harbor granting navigable water,
your interior is skillfully composed, your mace is a . . . mace released from heaven,
your holy area is a holy area of lapis-lazuli spreading over (the temple,) Mešlam.
Your prince, the powerful god, king of Mešlam,
the terrifying god of the underworld, the king of the sunset,
Nergal, Meš-lamta-eda,
erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Nergal in Gudua.

5.1.37 The House of Sîn in Ur (lines 468–478)

Ur was located near modern-day Baghdad in the northern plains. Its chief deity, Sîn, also called Nanna, was the moon god (see also 5.1.8 and 5.1.12).

O exalted Ur where Sîn renders judgment,
House with Teeming Cattle, spreading cattle yard,
Ašimbabbar performs your shepherding.
O house, my king, your scepter reaches to heaven,
. . . to the earth . . . joy

(this line is highly broken)

your prince, the prince of pure joy . . .
who goes out like a lapis-lazuli sky, joy . . . to whom a young man extends a hand in joy,
who illuminates the Land, . . . Sîn,
O House of Ur, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

10 lines: The House of Sîn in Ur.

5.1.38 The House of Utu in Zimbir (lines 479–493)

Zimbir (also called Sippar) was the northernmost city of the Mesopotamian plain. It was located at the point where the Tigris and Euphrates bent toward one another. The sun god, Utu, was the patron deity of the city. Utu was the god of justice. He looked down from his perch in the sky upon all of human activity. People often swore by Utu when making agreements, invoking his punishment should they fail to adhere to their promises.

O Zimbir, dais upon which Utu sits each day,
House of the Prince of Heaven, star of heaven, crown birthed by Ningal,
House of Utu, your prince . . ., fills heaven and earth.
When the lord lies down, the people lie down,
when he rises, the people rise.
The bull . . . and the people pay homage.
Before Utu the animals graze in pasture,
the black-headed bathe before him,
the Land . . . before him.
He measures out the divine presence, your shrine is a flood.
Rendering judgment where the sun rises, exalted sun, wearing a beard,
at night wearing the diadem,
Utu, king of the Shining House,
O House of Zimbir, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

14 lines: The House of Utu in Zimbir.

5.1.39 The House of Ninhursaga in HI.ZA (lines 494–506)

The location of HI.ZA is unknown but from the placement of this hymn it is thought to be near Zimbir (Sippar). In this hymn Ninhursaga is identified with Nintud, the mother of creation, who is present during birth, particularly of kings and other prominent leaders.

O House which is a Mountain, beautiful of plant and flower,
O HI.ZA, your interior is abundant.

The place where fate is determined you determine fate.
May the crown bring an outpouring to your holy area.
In your base, the Great Snake sleeps,
may many days light up your pure foundation.

Mother Nintud, the lady of creation,
in your interior she performs her work in the dark,
on the newly born king she places the diadem,
on the newly born lord she places, he is safe in her hand.
The midwife of heaven and earth, Ninhursaga,
O House of HI.ZA, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

12 lines: The House of Ninhursaga in HI.ZA.

5.1.40 The House of Inanna in Ulmaš (lines 507–519)

Ulmaš was located within the city of Akkad, the city that Sargon built as his capital. Inanna was one of the two prominent deities of this city, the other being Aba, who is mentioned in the following hymn. In this hymn, Inanna is a warrior who afflicts rebellious lands. This depiction of Inanna fits very well with the purpose of Akkad as the place from which Sargon expanded his empire.

O Ulmaš, upper land . . . of the Land,
terrifying lion goring a bull,
gathering the enemy in a net,
striking dumb a rebellious area,
as long as it is noncompliant and speaks lies she afflicts them.
House of Inanna, silver and lapis-lazuli, a storehouse constructed of gold,
your princess is an *urabu* bird, the priestess Nigin-gar.
dressed for battle, rejoicing and glorious, lining up the seven maces,
washing the battle implements,
opens the gate for battle . . .,
the exceedingly wise one of heaven, Inanna,
O House of Ulmash, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

12 lines: The House of Inanna in Ulmaš.

5.1.41 The House of Aba in Akkad (lines 520–528)

Aba is a fairly obscure deity who was worshiped primarily during the Sargonic dynasty. Aba's temple was on the right side of the city of Akkad

while Inanna's was on the left. Like Inanna, Aba was regarded as a warrior deity who, as this hymn says, "slaughters all in battle."

O house, the right arm . . .,
tilled green meadows,

(two lines are highly broken)

Your prince, the top dog . . .
who slaughters all in battle . . .,
Aba, the god of Akkad,
O House of Akkad, erected a house in your holy area and took a seat upon your dais.

8 lines: The House of Aba in Akkad.

5.1.42 The House of Nisaba in Ereš (lines 529–545)

Nisaba was the patron deity of scribes. Ereš was South of Akkad between Kish and Nippur. At the end of this hymn there is a colophon which attributes Enheduanna as the editor of this collection. It is uncertain whether this colophon was included in the original composition since the only extant texts date to several hundred years after the Temple Hymns were presumably written. It was exceedingly rare for authors/editors to attach their names to literary works. Most literary texts were anonymous compositions. There were instances in which writings were later attributed to legendary figures. Even if later scribes mistakenly attributed the Temple Hymns to Enheduanna, they linked the composition to a real person and not to a legendary character. If this colophon was added to the composition by Enheduanna herself, it is one of only a handful of instances in which Mesopotamian scribes assert themselves as an author of a literary text.

O House of Stars, House Adorned with Lapis-Lazuli, reaching into all lands,
a harmonious group regularly gathers at the shrine,
in Ereš. The primeval lords lift their heads to you each month.
They scrub the small ones with soap (?),
great Nanibgal, Nisaba
has brought divine presence from heaven and added to your presence
and enlarged the sanctuary facilitating praise.
The righteous woman who has discerning wisdom,
. . . soothing and opening the mouth,
always consulting lapis-lazuli tablets,
giving counsel to all lands,
the righteous woman, cleansing soap, born of the stylus,
measuring the heavens and apportioning the earth,

praise be to Nisaba.
The compiler of this tablet is Enheduanna.
My king, something has been produced that no person had produced before.

14 lines: The House of Nisaba in Ereš.[14]

Bibliography

Text: ETCSL 4.80.1; Åke W. Sjöberg and Eugen Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 3; Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1969).
Studies: Åke W. Sjöberg and Eugen Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, 1969; Betty De Shong Meador, *Princess, Priestess, Poet: The Sumerian Temple Hymns of Enheduanna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

5.2 Poems to Inanna

The next three hymns were written in Sumerian and are dedicated to the goddess Inanna. They are attributed to Enheduanna but there is some debate whether these attributions were original to the compositions or added sometime later. All three hymns are listed together at the beginning of an Old Babylonian literary catalogue in this order: *A Hymn to Inanna, Inanna and Ebih*, and *The Exaltation of Inanna*.[15] From this, some scholars think that these hymns belong together and should be regarded as a cycle similar to the collection of temple hymns above. If this is true, the cycle begins with a hymn that strongly asserts that Inanna is the most powerful deity in the pantheon. Inanna defies An and wages war against a mountain. The cycle would then end with Inanna coming to Enheduanna's aid. Possibly, this collection was meant to communicate the message that Inanna is willing and able to act on behalf of the leader of her temple.

5.2.1 A Hymn to Inanna

This hymn is strikingly different than most of the Sumerian compositions that celebrate a particular deity. Typically, the god or goddess in focus is

14 The total of fourteen lines given in the colophon of this hymn does not include the two lines immediately above it that function as a colophon for the entire collection. It is unclear why the colophon that governs the entire collection is nested inside a colophon that refers to this one hymn.

15 Mark Cohen, "Literary Texts from the Andrews University Archaeological Museum," *RA* 70 (1976): 131.

praised and his or her power and position is shown in relation to his or her standing within the pantheon. In this hymn, Inanna is said to be superior to every deity – even to An and Enlil, who are traditionally seen as supreme. No other god comes close to her abilities and no other god is able to stand in her way when she decides to act. The poem describes Inanna's martial strength and her ability to turn men into women on the battlefield. Also included is a list of Inanna's cultic personnel with ambiguous gender. Unfortunately, this hymn is badly broken in places. In some instances, sections as long as twenty lines are lost.

1–38

The large-hearted lady, the wild queen, joyous amongst the Anuna gods,
outstanding in all lands, daughter of the great Sîn, magnificent among the Great Princes,
magnificent queen who gathers the divine presence of heaven and earth and rivals the great An,
the greatest among the gods, she validates their verdicts.
The Anuna gods crawl at her magnificent word,
its path An does not know, he does not go against her command.
She changes her plan and no one knows it.
She completes the great divine presence, she holds the staff, the foremost magnificent one.
She is a great neck-stock upon the gods of the Land.
Her great fear covers the mountain and fills the roads.
At her imposing voice the gods of the Land become scared.
Her roaring makes the Anuna gods tremble like a single reed.
At the sound of her everyone hides together.
Without Inanna the great An cannot make a decision and Enlil cannot determine fate.
The mistress who raises her head over the mountains and is supreme, who attacks her?
Wherever she . . . cities become demon-haunted ruins and treasuries become wastelands.
Fear of her gives people tremors and causes them to flush like a man possessed by a demon.
She brings confusion and chaos to those who are disobedient,
swiftly bringing engulfing war and storms, clothed in awesome radiance.
For a game she incites conflict and combat, untried she straps on her sandals.
. . . in a storm . . . a noble garment.
. . . there is despair, a wind . . .
Inanna is mounted on a harnessed lion cutting down those who are not afraid.

A small lion, a lion of the hills, entering the streets and spreading mayhem . . .
The lady is a great bull trusting in its strength, no one confronts her authority.
. . . preeminent among the great nobles, a pit for the disobedient,
a trap for the hostile person, a . . . for the stranger.
Wherever she scatters poison . . .
Her fury boils . . . a storm that no one can withstand.
A giant watercourse, . . . she neglects those whom she doesn't like.
The lady, an eagle, who lets no one escape . . .
Inanna, a falcon, Inanna rips open the wide cattle pens
Inanna looks at the city in anger, the fields . . .
The fields Inanna . . . the furrows . . .
An attacks her . . .
The lady sets on fire the high plain . . .
Inanna . . .
The lady . . . battle . . . combat

39–72
. . . she sang a song.
The song . . . its content is weeping, the food and drink of death.
Whoever eats . . . Inanna's food and drink of death will not live.
Gall will burn those who eat it . . . in their mouths.
In her rejoicing heart she sings the song of death on the steppe.
She sings the song of her heart.
She washes her weapon with blood and puss . . .
Maces strike heads, spears eat, and battle axes are covered in blood.
Their evil mouths . . . heroes . . .
She pours blood onto their offerings, she sprinkles them with death.
On the wide and empty steppe she dims the rays of the sun and turns midday to darkness.
People look at one another in anger, they look for conflict.
Their noise disturbs the open country and advances against the meadows.
Her roaring is like that of Iškur. She makes the flesh of the foreign lands tremble.
No one can oppose her mighty battle. Who is her equal?
No one can look at her mighty fight, the battlefield . . .
Water rushes out, rushes out over the earth and nothing remains.
The lady, with a plow she opens up hard ground . . .
The prideful person doesn't lift his neck . . .
Her great heart accomplishes her bidding, the lady alone . . .
Majestic in the assembly, she sits in the great seat to the right and left . . .
Reducing huge mountains to piles of chaff . . .
She tears up lands from east to west . . .

Inanna . . . wall . . . *gulgul* stone . . . she obtains a victory.
The *kalag* stone as a large bowl . . . she makes it like sheep fat.
The joyous lady holds a dagger in her hand, radiance covers the Land,
her net unfurled over the deep waters piles up fish . . .
like she were a skilled bird catcher, no bird escapes from the mesh of her unfurled net.
The exalted place she uprooted . . .
. . . the plan of heaven and earth.
The intention of her command does not . . . An.
The reason for her veiled counsel before the assembly of the great gods is not known.

(two lines are highly broken)

73–92
The lady, a lion cub among the Anuna gods, is full of pride and has been given trust.
. . . struggle . . . poor person, Inanna . . .
A young woman in her room . . . approaching her . . . heart . . . plenty.
She malevolently . . . the woman she rejects.
The entire Land . . .
She roams around the street . . .
. . . of a house that a wife sees her child.
She removed disease from her flesh and prayed.
She paid homage with a meal and called out "*pilipili*."[16]
She snapped the spear like a man . . . gave her a weapon.
. . . punishment . . .
She broke down the door of the house of wisdom, she revealed its interior.
Those who do not fear her unfurled net do not escape the mesh of her unfurled net.
She doesn't respect the man she nominated, approaching a woman she snapped a weapon and gave her a spear.
The male *gišgisagkeš*, the *nisub*, the female *gišgi*, received punishment . . .
the prophet, the transformed *pilipili*, the *kurgarra*, the *sagursag* priests,[17]
lament and song . . .
They tire themselves with tears, distress . . .
Weeping each day your heart is not . . .
Compassion . . . the heart does not know.

93–98
Beloved lady of pure An, your . . . tears . . .

16 The meaning of this term is unclear.
17 The meanings of these terms is unclear. They indicate participants in cultic rituals but their exact function is not clear.

in heaven . . .
your chest . . .
You alone are splendid, you have renown in heaven and earth, your position is not supplanted.
An and Enlil, your peers, sit in their great seats,
Your cultic place is supreme. Your ways are splendid.

99–108
Ašan . . . splendid dais . . .
Iškur who yells from heaven . . .
His dense clouds . . .
When the great divine presence of heaven and earth . . .
Inanna, your furious triumph . . .
The Anuna bow down and bend.
You ride upon seven great beasts when you exit from heaven.
Great An is afraid of your holy area and trembles at your dwelling place.
He let you sit in the dwelling place of great An and no longer feared you.
"Splendid rites, great rites, I will place in your hand."

109–114
The great gods kissed the ground, they knelt down.
The elevated land, land of carnelian and lapis-lazuli bowed down before you.
Ebih did not bow down before you, he did not bless you.
As you wished, in anger you split it like an angry storm.
Lady, you are supreme due to the power of An and Enlil . . .
Apart from you fate is not determined and there is no skillful advice.

115–168
To run, to flee, to calm, to bring rest, Inanna, are yours.
To roam, to hasten, to rise, to fall . . . Inanna, are yours.
To open routes and roads, to make the journey a place of peace, a friend to the helpless, Inanna, are yours.
To make level paths and tracks, to break up and make firm, Inanna, are yours.
To destroy, to create, to cut apart, to establish, Inanna, are yours.
To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man, Inanna, are yours.
Allure and arousal, possession and property, Inanna, are yours.
Profit, gain, modest wealth, and great wealth, Inanna, are yours.
Expanding wealth and building wealth, loss and deficit of wealth, Inanna, are yours.
Examination, scrutiny, close examination, and inspection, Inanna, are yours.
Praise, protective deities, flourishing, and regarding cultic places, Inanna, are yours

(six lines are highly broken)

. . . a large and expansive heart, Inanna, are yours.
. . . are yours, Inanna, are yours.
Making the heart beat . . ., to be ill, to shiver . . ., Inanna, are yours.
To acquire wives . . . to love good things, and goodness are yours, Inanna, are yours.
Attractiveness, haughtiness, and health, Inanna, are yours.
Crushing and heaping up, raising up and forcing down, straight and crooked, Inanna, are yours.
To build a house, to make a woman's space, to acquire possessions, and to kiss the lips of the helpless, Inanna, are yours.
To sprint, to run, to plot, and to sue are yours, Inanna, are yours.
To mix the inferior and the strong, the weak and the anemic, Inanna, are yours.
To mix the high and the deep, the rising and falling, Inanna, are yours.
To grant the crown, the throne, and the kingly scepter, Inanna, are yours.

(twelve lines are missing)

To be small, to be great, to be flat, to be wide, all of it, to spread wide, Inanna, are yours.
To give cultic and cosmic rites, to deliver commands,
to lie, deceive, slander, speak duplicitously, overstate, Inanna, are yours.
Lies and honest answers, scoffing, violent speech,
offering mockery, hostile speech, bearing teeth, shamed and deemed important,
gloomy and taboo, happiness, hating, shining, darkening,
fear, terror, panic, radiance, splendor,
victory, leadership, cramping, insomnia and sleeplessness,
submission . . .
combat, confusion, offering battle, swift field of war,
. . . knowing all,
to build a nest . . . for the future . . .
the steppe . . . like a snake . . . fear . . . to make the enemy submit,
. . . Inanna, are yours.

(lines 169–173 are highly broken)

174–187
. . . the couriers,
when you open your mouth . . . enters.

With your look the deaf person does not . . . to the one who can hear.
With your anger light turns dark, midday becomes black.
The day came to pass when you destroyed the place that was in your heart, you made that place tremble. Your deeds are deeds that cannot be thwarted.
Your great deeds, who can oppose them? You are the lady of heaven and earth.
Inanna, resident of the palace of the impartial judge, amongst all the people, decisions . . .
Your gift exceeds the mountains, An is not equal . . .
In your vast wisdom, amongst all the gods . . . you alone are majestic.
Of the gods of heaven and earth, as many as there are, you are the great cow.
When you lift your eyes they are alert, they await your word.
At the place where you live, the Anuna gods stand pleading.
Great fear, praise . . .
May your praise never cease, where is your name not magnificent?

(lines 188–196 are missing)

197–202
Your song is lament, wailing . . .Your . . . cannot be changed. Your anger is oppressive.
Your work is something that cannot be . . . An cannot impede your order regarding construction.
Through your men, An and Enlil, you have bestowed the great assembly . . . oh woman.
Together, An and Enlil . . . placed the land into your hand . . .
The matter you spoke to An, he has not addressed.

203–208
Your declaration was "let it be" and the great An could not undo it.
Your "let it be" was a "let it be" free of destruction . . . destruction.
When you return your message to the assembly, An and Enlil are not able to quash it.
Once you speak your decision, in neither heaven nor earth can it be changed.
The place about which you have spoken, "let it be" cannot experience destruction.
The place about which you have spoken, "destruction" cannot experience "let it be."

209–218
Your divinity shines in pure heaven like Nanna and Utu.

Your torch illumines the corners of heaven; it brightens the darkness.
Men and women stand in rows for you. The situation of each is apparent before you.
All your [subjects] come before you, like before Utu, for inspection.
No one can lay a hand on your priceless divine presence. All your divine presence . . .
In heaven and earth your nobility is complete. You have everything in your hand.
Lady, you are magnificent. No one comes before you.
You live with the great An in the pure bedroom.
What god harvests like you, harvesting heaven and earth?
You are magnificent. Your name is praised. You alone are magnificent.

219–253
Enheduanna, the priestess
. . . Nanna

(one line is broken)
(twenty lines are missing)
(one line is broken)

Instruction . . .
Happiness, calamity . . . compassion . . .
My lady, may your heart always have sympathy for me . . .
I am yours always. May your heart be cool to me.
Your wisdom and intercession . . .
Before you . . . may my offering be enough.
Your divinity goes out over all the land.
My flesh has known your great authority.
Grievous lament prevents me from sleeping, paralyzing distress . . .
Compassion, supplication, favor, encouragement, and honor are yours as are drowning storms, fissuring solid ground, and placing darkness in place of light.

254–263
My lady, let me laud your greatness in all the lands.
Let me send out praise of your actions and honor.
Who is equal to your divinity?
Who can match your rites?
May the great An, who you love, speak to you in compassion.
May the great gods pacify your emotions.
May the lapis-lazuli dais be suitable for your nobility . . .
May your magnificent dwelling say to you: "Be seated."
May your pure bed say to you: "Recline."

Your . . . the place from where Utu goes out . . .

264–274
They promulgate your magnificence, you yourself are the lady.
An and Enlil, throughout the entire heavens, have decreed a great fate for you.
They granted nobility to the throne room.
You decree the nobility of ladies that are suitable for ladyship.
You are the lady, you are magnificent, you are weighty.
You are Inanna, you are magnificent, you are weighty.
My lady, your magnificence is apparent.
May your heart return to affection toward me.
Your great deeds are unequalled.
Your greatness is widely praised.
Young woman, Inanna, your glory is sweet.

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5.2.2 Inanna and Ebih

In this story the goddess Inanna confronts the mountain range of Ebih, the modern Jebel Hamrin. The confrontation began because Inanna did not believe that the mountain showed her respect because it refused to grovel at her feet. Inanna dressed for battle and appeared before An to ask him for his favor. An tries to dissuade her from what he views as an impossible task – who can prevail against a mountain!? Inanna becomes angry and fights Ebih on her own. She splits the mountain in half and exults in her victory.

The Ebih mountain range formed a natural barrier between Babylonia to the south and Assyria to the north and even to this day it forms a linguistic barrier between the Arabic-speaking parts of southern Iraq and the Kurdish-speaking regions in the north. Nicholas Postgate describes the mountains as

an abrupt wall that "runs in an amazingly straight and regular line for hundreds of kilometers."[18] This poem could be seen as an etiological story that explains this geological feature.

1–9
Goddess of divine presence, clad in luminosity, riding on the great divine presence,
Inanna, made complete by the power of the pure weapon, covered in blood,
running around in great battles, she plants a shield into the ground,
battered by storm and wind,
great lady, Inanna, knowing well how to plot conflict,
you destroy mighty lands with the arrow and overcome lands with power.
In heaven and on earth you roar like a lion and terrify the people.
Like a giant wild bull you triumph over the armies of foreign lands.
Like a fearsome lion you pacify with your gall the insubordinate and rebellious.

10–22
My lady, growing up in heaven,
young woman, Inanna, becoming as great as the earth,
going out like king Utu, stretching your arms wide,
walking the heavens clad in fearsome luminosity,
wearing the brightness of the sun on the earth,
walking on the mountains, bringing out brightness,
washing the flowers (in light),
giving birth to the clean mountain, the mountainous pure place,
. . .
being good with the mace like a joyful lord, like a rejoicing lord,
enthusiastic in battle like a wondrous weapon.
All the people shout in tune,
all the lands sweetly sing their song.

23–24
The lady of battle, the great child of Sîn,
the young woman Inanna, I will praise. Here is my cry:

25–32
When I, the goddess, was roaming heaven and roaming around earth,
when I, Inanna, was roaming heaven and roaming around earth,
roaming Elam and Subir,
roaming the Lulubi mountains,
and turned to the heart of the mountain,
I, the goddess, approached the mountain and it did not fear me.
I, Inanna, approached the mountain and it did not fear me.

18 *Early Mesopotamia*, 8.

I approached the peak of Ebih and it did not fear me.

33–52
Since they did not fear me –
they did not put their noses to the ground,
nor did they drag their lips through the dust –
I will fill the soaring peak with the fear of me.
Against its hulking sides I will place a hulking battering ram.
Against its puny sides I will place a puny battering ram.
I will overtake it and play pure Inanna's game.
I will bring battle to the peak and make conflict against it.
I will make arrows for the quiver.
I will form stones for the sling.
I will sharpen the spear.
I will make the throw stick and the shield.
I will set fire to the edge of its forest.
I will put an ax to its wickedness.
I will make Gibil, the cleanser, bare his pure teeth at its water courses.
I will spread fear through the unapproachable peak of Aratta.
Like a city which An has cursed, may that place never be reinstated.
(Like a city against which) Enlil is angry, may it never lift its neck.
May the mountain quake when I approach,
May Ebih praise me and celebrate me.

53–64
Inanna, daughter of Sîn,
put on a royal garment and covered herself with joy.
She decorated her forehead with fearsome splendor and luminosity.
She made a string of beads for her throat.
She powerfully wielded a trusty seven-headed weapon.
She put bands of lapis-lazuli on her feet.
In the evening she came out regally
and followed the path to the gate of astonishment.
She brought an offering to An and uttered a prayer to him.
An, rejoicing in Inanna,
came forward and sat in his place.
His greatness filled the heavens.

65–92
(Inanna said) "An, my father, I hope you are well. Please listen to my words.
You have spread the fear of me amongst the deities of heaven.
Because of you, O An, no one questions my word in heaven or on earth.
You have given me the ax,
the signet, and the emblem.
Putting the platform in place and establishing the throne and foundation,

holding the strength of a weapon which bends like a *mubum* tree,
holding the ground with the six-fold strap,
pulling the reigns with the four-fold strap,
slaughtering at the way stations and attacking the routes,
to appear to the kings . . . going out like the moonlight from heaven,
shooting an arrow from the arm at field, orchard, and forest like the bite of a locust,
flattening rebel lands with the harrow,
removing the bolts from the gates so the doors stay open,
king An, you have given me this . . .
You put me at the right hand of the king to destroy rebel lands,
to smash heads like a falcon at the base of a mountain,
king An, may I spread your name through the land like a thread.
May he repel the lands like a snake in a hole.
May he make them crawl like a serpent coming down a mountain.
May he contain the mountain, look it over, and ascertain its length.
May he go out on the pure campaign of An and ascertain its depth.
The desire of the gods,
Inanna of the Anuna deities . . .
How can it be that the mountain did not fear me in heaven or on earth,
that the mountain did not fear me, Inanna, in heaven or on earth,
that the peak of Ebih, the mountain,
did not fear me in heaven or on earth?"

93–111

"Since they did not fear me –
they did not put their noses to the ground,
nor did they drag their lips through the dust –
I will fill the soaring peak with the fear of me.
Against its hulking sides I will place a hulking battering ram.
Against its puny sides I will place a puny battering ram.
I will overtake it and play pure Inanna's game.
I will bring battle to the peak and make conflict against it.
I will make arrows for the quiver, I will form stones for the sling,
I will sharpen the spear,
I will make the throw stick and the shield.
I will set fire to the edge of its forest,
I will put an ax to its wickedness.
I will make Gibil, the cleanser, bare his pure teeth at its water courses.
I will spread fear through the unapproachable peak of Aratta.
Like a city which An has cursed, may that place never be reinstated.
(Like a city against which) Enlil is angry, may it never lift its neck.
May the mountain quake when I approach,
May Ebih praise me and celebrate me."

112–130
An, king of the deities, answered her:
"My little one desires the destruction of the mountain. What is she doing?
Inanna desires the destruction of the mountain. What is she doing?
She desires the destruction of the peak of Ebih. What is she doing?
It has brought fear to the dwellings of the gods.
It has spread anxiety through the pure domiciles of the Anuna gods.
It released its fear and terror onto the land.
It released the mountain's radiance and terror onto all the areas.
Its magnitude extends royally to the center of heaven.
Fruit hangs in its bounteous orchard and rejoicing spreads.
Its magnificent trees produce admiration.
In Ebih, in the shade of its spreading branches, are an abundance of lions,
deer and stags are in abundance,
in tall stands of grass are wild bulls.
Deer mate among the cypress trees of the mountain.
You cannot enter its fear and terror.
The radiance of the mountain is terrible.
Young woman, Inanna, you cannot oppose it."
Thus, he said.

131–151
The priestess, in her rage and anger,
opened the house,
pushed open the lapis-lazuli door,
brought out magnificent battle and sent a giant storm.
Pure Inanna took hold of a quiver.
She raised a blistering storm of evil dust.
She stirred up an evil blistering wind of potsherds.
My lady encountered the mountain range.
She went step by step.
She sharpened both edges of her dagger.
She took Ebih's neck as if tearing up grass.
She pressed the blade into its heart.
She yelled like thunder.
The stones making up Ebih
crashed down its back.
From its sides and crevices great horned vipers spat poison.
She cursed its forest and damned its trees.
She killed its oaks with drought.
She put fire to its back and fanned its smoke.
The lady spread the battle over the entire mountain.
Pure Inanna had created what she wanted.

152–165
She went to the peak of Ebih and said to it:
"O mountain, because of your height, because of your elevation,
because of your beauty, because of your adornment,
because you are wearing a pure garment,
because you extend to the heavens,
because you did not put your nose to the ground,
because you did not drag your lips through the dust,
I have killed your heart and flattened you.
As if you were an elephant I took hold of your tusk,
As if you were a great wild bull I brought you to the ground with your giant horns,
As if you were an ox I subdued your magnificent strength to the ground and I pursued you to ruin.
I made your eyes produce tears,
I put lament in your heart.
On your back, birds build nest of affliction."

166–181
For a second time, taking comfort in her fearsome terror, she spoke righteously:
"My father, Enlil, has brought my fear to the heart of the mountains.
To my right arm he brought a weapon,
to my left arm he brought . . .
My anger, a harrow with giant teeth, has ripped apart the mountain.
I built a place and have done additional things.
I put a throne in place and made its foundation sure.
I gave the *kurgarra* daggers and maces.
I gave drums to the lamentation singers.
I have changed the headgear of the *pilipili*.
I attained victory in my opposition to the mountain.
I attained victory in my opposition to the peak, Ebih.
I went out like the surge of a flood,
like swelling water I burst the dam.
I set my victory onto the mountain.
I set my victory onto Ebih."

182–184
For destroying Ebih, the great child of Sîn,
the young woman, Inanna, be praised.
Nisaba be praised.[19]

19 Nisaba was the patron deity of scribes. *Inanna and Ebih* was one of the works that apprentice scribes copied as part of their scribal education.

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5.2.3 The Exaltation of Inanna

Unlike the other two poems dedicated to Inanna, Enheduanna puts herself and her petition at the very center of this composition. Inanna is praised – she is lauded as strong and fearsome, radiant and beautiful – but this praise is intended to ingratiate her toward Enheduanna's request. The priestess recounts the experience of a usurper, Lugal-ane, driving her out of the temple. During this time the temple was not kept up and Inanna became enraged. Once Enheduanna is reinstalled and the usurper driven away, Inanna's wrath cools and the situation returns to status quo. It appears that this poem is based on real events but we do not know of Enheduanna's exile apart from this document.

1–12
Lady of perfect divine presence, gleaming light,
righteous woman clothed in splendor, loved by An and Uraš,
priestess of heaven with the great diadem,
loving the righteous tiara appropriate for the office of the priestess
who has assimilated seven of its divine presences.
My lady, you are the guardian of the great divine presences.
You have carried divine presence, you have hung it from your hand.
You have gathered divine presence, you have brought it to your chest.
Like a dragon you have delivered poison to foreign lands.
Like Iškur you roar and plants are unable to exist before you.
As a flood washing over foreign lands,
foremost of heaven and earth, you are their Inanna.

13–19
Igniting bursts of fire through the Land,

given divine presence by An, the lady who rides on a lion,
whose message is spoken at the pure direction of An.
The great rituals are yours, who can know them?
Destroyer of lands, you give power to the storms.
Beloved of Enlil, you have brought fear to the Land.
You enact An's command.

20–33
My lady, at your voice the foreign lands bend down.
In fear and splendor humanity
comes before you in silence.
You possess the most awesome of divine presences.
The threshold of mourning is opened because of you,
and people walk the path to the house of great lament.
In the front of the battle, everything is struck down before you.
My lady, with your strength, teeth can shatter flint.[20]
You spin forward like a spinning storm.
Like the shouting of a storm you shout,
you continually roar with Iškur.
You bring fatigue with the wind,
while your feet remain tireless.
With the drum of lament a song is produced.

34–41
My lady, the great Anuna gods
scatter like scared bats heading for shelter.
They do not stand before your furious gaze.
They do not confront your furious expression.
Who can cool your blazing heart?
Your hateful heart is too powerful to cool.
Lady, can your emotions be sweetened? Lady, can your heart be joyed?
Your anger cannot be cooled, eldest daughter of Sîn.

42–59
Lady who is puissant over the lands, who can take anything from your area?
Once you have taken your area over the hills,[21] the plants are diseased,
and the gates are set afire.[22]
Because of you blood pours into the river from which the people drink.[23]
They must bring their army captive before you, all together.

20 In this line a pun is formed by the use of teeth (zu_2) and flint ($^{na4}zu_2$).
21 Two copies of this text read the first half of this line, "If you frown at the mountains."
22 One copy of this text reads this line, "The palaces are set afire."
23 Two copies of this text read this line, "Because of you blood pours into the river and the people could not drink it."

They must split up their soldiers before you, all together.
They must stand their capable men before you, all together.
A squall has filled the play-field of the city.
They haul hard-bodied men before you as captives.
Your concern has gone out to the city that has not said, "The foreign lands are yours";
wherever they have not said, "It is our father's,"
and it is returned under your feet.
Care is taken from its pastures.
Its women no longer speak sweetly to their spouse,
she doesn't talk with him at night,
and she no longer reveals her heart's true thoughts.
Troubled wild cow, eldest daughter of Sîn,
lady more powerful than An, who can remove anything from your area?

60–65
Righteous divine presence, great lady of ladies,
acting from a pure heart, more powerful than your own mother,
expansive in knowledge and clever, lady of all foreign lands,
sustainer of life, I will sing your pure song.
Righteous deity, deserving of divine presence, your great commands are magnificent.
Radiant-hearted, righteous woman clean of heart, I will speak of your divine presence.[24]

66–73
My holy residence, I entered
into your service. I am Enheduanna.
I carried the basket and sang the work song.
Funeral offerings were brought as if I never lived there.[25]
I approached the sun but the sun burned me.
I approached the shade but the wind enveloped me.
My mouth of honey became a mouth of phlegm.
My ability to ameliorate situations turned to dust.

74–80
Regarding my fate and Lugal-ane, Sîn,
speak to An and may An release it.
Look, when you speak to An he will release me.
The woman will remove that fate from Lugal-ane –
Foreign lands and floods lie down at her feet.

24 Two copies of this text reads the last phrase, "your righteous divine presence," while one copy reads, "your pure divine presence."
25 One copy of this text reads the first phrase, "My afternoon meal."

That woman is so powerful that she makes cities shake.
Stand up so that she will cool her heart for me.

81–90

I, Enheduanna, will utter a supplication to you.
My tears, like good beer,
to you pure Inanna, I will let loose. I will say, "Your judgment."[26]
Regarding Ašimbabbar, do not be troubled.
Regarding the ritual cleansing of pure An, (Lugal-ane) has changed all of his things
and has deprived An of the House of An.
He has not feared the greatest deity.
That temple and its abundance, he destroyed. Its luxuriousness, he brought to an end.
That temple, he profaned.
He entered before me as if he were a friend but actually he approached with envy.

91–108

My righteous divine wild cow, run off the man, seize the man.
In the place of encouragement, what is my standing?
That place which is a troublesome rebel toward your Nanna, may An flatten.
That city, may An shatter.
May Enlil curse it.
May its weeping child not be soothed by its mother.
Lady, at the place of lament,
may your ship of lament be left in a hostile place.
Must I die because of my pure song?
My Nanna has not asked about me.[27]
He has completely destroyed me in a lawless place.
Ašimbabbar has not pronounced a judgment on me.
What is it to me if he has spoken my fate? What is it to me if he has not spoken my fate?
He stood defiantly and ran me out of the temple.
He made me fly like a swallow from a window. I used up all my vitality.
He made me walk through the thorns growing in the mountains.
He deprived me of the rightful crown of the priestess.[28]
He gave me a knife and a dagger and said, "These are appropriate accessories for you."

26 Some manuscripts read, "Greetings" in place of "Your judgment."
27 One copy reads, "My Nanna has not decided my case."
28 One copy reads, "He deprived me of the rightful garment . . . "

109–121
Most valuable lady, beloved by An,
your pure heart is magnificent, may it be reconciled to me.
Beloved spouse of Ušumgal-ana[29]
you are the horizon, the zenith, the great lady.
The Anuna have submitted to you.
From birth you were junior royalty,
you are now superior to the Anuna, the great gods.
The Anuna kiss the ground before you.
My own judgment has not been issued, but a hostile judgment encircles me as if it were meant for me.
To the flower bed I did not stretch my hand.[30]
The spoken word of Ningal I did not reveal to anyone.
I am the brilliant priestess of Nanna,
my lady, beloved of An, may your heart be soothed toward me.

122–138
It must be known; it must be known. Nanna has not spoken. He has said, "He is yours."
Know that you are magnificent as the heavens.
Know that you are as vast as the earth.
Know that you destroy the rebel land.
Know that you call out to the foreign land.
Know that you dash heads.
Know that you eat corpses like a dog.
Know that your eyes are furious.
Know that you raise your furious eyes.
Know that your eyes are ablaze.
Know that you are strong and immovable.
Know that you stand defiant.
Nanna has not spoken. He has said, "He is yours."
My lady, he has made you great, you are the most magnificent.
My lady, beloved by An, I will speak of your raging.[31]
I have piled the charcoal. I have prepared the cleansing ritual.
The House of Ešdam-kug is ready for you. Might your heart not be soothed toward me?

139–143
Because it overwhelmed me, because it exceeded me, I sing this song to you, great lady.
That which was spoken to you at night,

29 Ušumgal-ana is another name for the god An.
30 One copy reads, "My flower bed . . . "
31 One copy reads the last phrase as, "I will speak of your platforms."

may a singer repeat to you at mid-day.
Because of your captive spouse, because of your captive child,
your anger grows, your heart is not soothed.

144–154
The forceful lady has authority amongst all the rulers,
has accepted her prayers from her.
Inanna's pure heart has returned to its normal state.
The light was good to her, happiness adorned her, and she was full of rejoicing.
Like the moon's glow, she lifted up rejoicing.
Nanna came out to admire her properly.
Her mother, Ningal, blessed her.
The doorjamb greeted her.
Everyone's speech to the priestess is magnificent.
Praise be to the destroyer of foreign lands, allotted divine presence by An,
to my lady, covered with attractiveness, to Inanna.

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5.3 Other Literary Compositions

5.3.1 Letter-prayer of Inannaka to Nintinuga

Supplicants could bring their requests before deities in a variety of ways. Letter-prayers were petitions that were laid in front of a statue of a particular god. In most cases, the people who used letter-prayers were kings or wealthy individuals. This is understandable considering the expense of hiring a scribe to write the letter and giving an offering to the priest when depositing it within a temple. The individual would take the letter to a temple and the priest would place it within the sanctuary. Much like modern forms of prayer in which a petitioner lights a candle that remains burning after the individual exits a church, a letter-prayer would remain in front of a deity for a longer period of time than a momentarily uttered prayer.

In this letter, Inannaka of Nippur, a daughter of the high priest of Enlil, writes to Nintinuga and asks that her health be restored. Nintinuga was a goddess of healing (her name means "Lady who gives life to the dead") and her principal site of worship was in Nippur. The structure of the letter is identical to those sent by men: the deity is praised, the petitioner outlines his/her need, a specific request is given, and the supplicant promises to do something for the deity once their request is granted. This letter was part of the scribal curriculum and over a dozen copies are extant. We have included this letter-prayer here because of its poetic nature and because it was a part of the scribal curriculum. Whether it was originally an actual letter-prayer that subsequently entered the curriculum or a piece of literature that took the form of a letter-prayer is hard to know. Whatever its origin it became a piece of literature once it was read and recopied. Another letter-prayer is known, from the Old Assyrian period, to the goddess Tašmetum by lady Akatiya; but only a small part of it is preserved.[32]

1–2
Say to Nintinuga, the loyal steward of the Ekur temple, the healer of the land:

3–7
To the lady whose incantation gives life to all the people, whose spells ameliorate the people, compassionate lady, rejuvenator of humanity, lover of supplication, soft of heart, merciful, who hears petitions:

8–11
You check on the living and the dead, you are the restorer of the broken. And so Inannaka, daughter of Enlil-amah, your servant, asks:

12–18
Having taken ill a second time, I have such agony and I do not know when it will end. My lady, someone built a house for me and I sit silently. Friend and family have left me. I have no one to check in on me. It is a lot for me, too much! I am extremely distressed.

19–21
If it is my lady's will, may she cause this great demon to break free of me. May she set my feet on the path of life.

22–25
I am her servant, as the courtyard sweeper of her temple, I will work for her. As soon as I am well I will name my lady, "The Restorer of the Broken."

32 Translated in Guido Kryszat, "Ein altassyrischer Brief and die Göttin Tašmētum," in *Festschrift für Burkhart Kienast zu seinem 70. Geburtstage, dargebracht von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen* (ed. Gebhard J. Selz; AOAT 274; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003), 251–259.

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5.3.2 Ninšatapada to Rim-Sin

This letter presents Ninšatapada, the high priestess of the underworld deity Meš-lamta-eda in Durum, as its author. The purported sender, Ninšatapada, speaks in the first person and she presents herself as a female scribe, *munus dub-sar*, in line 16. The letter is addressed to Rim-Sin, the king of Larsa. Rim-Sin had overthrown the kings who succeeded Ninšatapada's father, Sin-kašid, the king of Uruk. Ninšatapada praises Rim-Sin and the city of Larsa, and says that An and Enlil gave Rim-Sin his victory over Uruk. She also requests that Rim-Sin end her exile in Durum. These circumstances indicate that, if the letter is genuine, it was written around 1800 BCE.

This letter was included in the royal correspondence of Larsa, which may indicate that Ninšatapada's request was granted. On other other hand, it could be a piece of propaganda composed by a scribe from Larsa to justify Rim-Sin's overthrow of Sin-kašid's dynasty. Some of the same phrases and the date formula that appear in this letter also appear in documents and inscriptions from Larsa. This letter entered the scribal curriculum and six copies of it are extant. Whether it was a real letter or a piece of political literature is hard to say. Since it entered the scribal curriculum we have included it in this chapter instead of the chapter of letters, to reflect its role within scribal culture.

1
Say to my king:

2–7
Rim-Sin, the young supervisor who works for Enlil, the faithful shepherd, faithfully given to save the whole nation, all-knowing, exceedingly wise, assimilating everything, the advisor of dispassionate wisdom whose value none can fully see, the true judge who loves the righteous person like Utu himself.

Speak again:

8–15
The one who has pity on the wide land, the hero who repays the city, whirling bull of battle, hero lifting combat, furious one repelling the force(?) that no one knows how to turn back, the authority before whom a person is not able to stand, even the strongest cannot stand tall, the prince – the chief official – brings victory and head-crushing kingship. The strong one, confiscating the enemy's weapon as booty, the spawn of the lord Nergal, gallant out of the womb.

Speak a third time:

16–19
Ninšatapada – the female scribe, priestess of the divine Meš-lamta-eda, daughter of Sin-kašid, king of Uruk –, your servant says:

20–34
As for Larsa, the city exalted like a mountain whose strength none can approach, rising up at the command of An and Enlil, you took the mound. The head of Uruk, the leader of all lands, lowered its horns like a bull. With your great strength you seized its king in a single sortie. Having spared its population, grant them a good life. Among the slaves and children fed on milk, epidemics have not broken out, disease has not taken hold. Its population has scattered like fish in water(?), they abandoned the city to the sun. Its warriors have been routed by the mace before you; it was your hand that met them. They escaped death and praised you. The tears of Uruk have become joy; its complaint is gone. A provisioner placed the orphan and widow in the grass and let them rest in a meadow. Each day the people and the lands eat from its environs. Your good years are of grace. All the lands rejoice. In former days, who has seen a king like you in battle? And so Utu resides in Ebabbar for life.

35–42
Look favorably upon me, let your pronouncement brighten this dark day. They have made me live like a slave these five years away from my city. I have nothing. Because of your silence, my countenance has changed. My body is dead; my course is bent. In the deserted place I clap my hands, I do

not know . . . Though I am youthful in old age, I am abandoned, I am driven from my bedroom. Like a bird in a cage with its young gone from its nest, my children are scattered afar. I do not have anyone to work for me. They do not clammer for my home – they moan about it like doves.

43–47
My food fills me with lament. I cannot be calmed. Life is interminable. They gossip about my calamity. I have become an insulted woman. As to my position, they have made me a servant. Give ear to this situation! My female servant will not make me a garment while I am dressed in rags! Who will speak for me?

48–49
I have sung your tearful lament. Will you yet be unmoved? Since the day humanity ground to a halt, it has been a day of ominous fate. My words are of no effect.

50–58
Now that Enlil has spoken, all of the lands are put in your hand. Zabalam is a residence, Durum is my city, it is great . . . No residence is equal to the city of humanity. Let them apprehend my city. My two gods, Emeslam, I will sing your praise. Restore the borders of the land to my family. At your command let them praise you. May they make me understand how to enact your command. You illumine even the very back of the land. May you never be forgotten.

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5.3.3 Lullaby for a Son of Šulgi

This lullaby is often linked with Abi-šimti or one of the other wives of king Šulgi (ca. 2000 BCE). Šulgi is specifically mentioned in this composition but the speculation that one of his wives wrote it or commissioned a scribe to write it for them rests merely on the assumption that a woman is the most

likely author of a lullaby. This assumption perhaps tells us more about the perspective of modern scholars than it does about the composition itself.

The lullaby also goes by another title which mimics the onomatopoeia of the first line, "ua-aua." Large parts of the lullaby are directed to the baby himself but in other parts the speech is set in the third person and in one section the speaker addresses personified Sleep. In addition to a desire that the baby fall asleep, the narrator of this lullaby also invokes wishes that the child grow and flourish and be prepared for his adult life. Unfortunately, this text is highly broken and the end is missing.

1–5
ua-aua
At my lament, may he grow.
At my lament, may he get big.
May he grow roots,
like a tree may his branches spread.

6–11
Lord, from this you know where we are:
apple trees extend over the river,
will a passerby extend a hand,
will someone lying raise a hand?
Sleep will enter you;
sleep will come to you.

12–18
Sleep, come. Sleep, come.
Sleep, come here to my son.
Sleep, hurry here to my son.
Make his open eyes go to sleep.
Place your hand on his glinting eyes.
And his active tongue,
let its activity not destroy his sleep.

19–23
May he fill your lap with emmer
while I sweeten cheese curds for you –
this cheese is a physician for humankind,
a physician for humankind and of the lord's son,
the son of lord Šulgi.

24–30
In my garden are lettuces that I have watered.
I have chopped the hearts of lettuce.
The lettuces, let my lord eat.
At my lament, let me give him a wife.

Let me give him a wife; let me give him a son.
May a good-hearted nurse talk with him;
May a good-hearted nurse suckle him.

31–38
Let me [provide?] a wife for my son.
May she bear him a good son.
May his wife lie in his hot loins.
May his son lie in his broad arms.
May his wife be good to him.
May his son be good to him.
May his young wife rejoice in his loins.
May his son grow on his good knees.

39–48
You are troubled.
I am tired,
I am speechless(?), looking at the stars
the half moon illuminates my face.
Your bones might hang from the wall.
The man on the wall might weep for you.
The mongoose might play an instrument for you.
The gecko might scratch its cheek for you.
The fly might trouble its lips for you.
The lizard might stick out its lip for you.

49–56
May this song make him bloom.
May this song make him blossom.
When you bloom, when you blossom,
when you . . . shake the churn,
sleep . . .
bedroom . . .
A soothing sound . . .
Brings joy . . .

57–63
May your wife be your ration, may a son . . .
May a son be your share.
May winnowed grain be your spouse.
May Ezina-Kusu[33] be your helper.
May you acquire sweet-speaking Lama.[34]
May you be reared during a term of sweet days.
May you be favored with festivals.

33 Ezina-Kusu is the goddess of grain. 34 Lama is a goddess of protection.

64–66
My son . . . doesn't know the stakes.
He doesn't know his age.
He doesn't know . . . his abode.

67–91
May you find . . .
May you eat . . .

(14 lines are highly broken)

Ninkasi[35] . . . a mash-tub . . .

(5 lines are highly broken)

The shepherd's wife . . .
. . . the date palm . . .
He brings shoots among his offerings.

92–114
And you – lie in sleep.
May your palm tree stretch out its frond
like a distant fig tree.
May he place coals beside Ur;
may he place ash beside Uruk.
May he grab the enemy by the mouth like a . . .
May he tie his arms like a bundle of reeds.
Make the enemy be afraid before you
lest he split your shoulder like a sack.

(the remainder of this text is highly broken)

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5.3.4 Šu-Sin, The Ideal Lover (Šu-Sin A)

Love poetry has a long history within Mesopotamia. Sumerian compositions are attested from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods (2100–1800 BCE)

35 Ninkasi is the goddess of beer.

and onward. Many of the earliest love poems were religiously oriented. They presented mythologies of procreating deities that were linked to agricultural fertility and weather cycles. These poems were recited, often by the king, in the context of national religious festivals.[36] Other poets explored the romantic and sexual aspects of humans. At times, ordinary people were subjects but more commonly royal figures were central to these compositions. Accordingly, some scholars have compared Mesopotamian love poetry with the biblical book, Song of Songs.[37]

This love poem was presumably composed and performed when Kubatum, wife of Šu-Sin king of Ur (ca. 2037–2029), first gave birth. This text was likely written in the Ur III period during the reign of Šu-Sin but the copy that survives is from Nippur and dates to the Isin-Larsa period (ca. 2003–1831). The poem is written in two Sumerian dialects: the standard form, Emegir, and Emesal, which in some cases seems to have been used to indicate the speech of women. Although the use of these dialects is not entirely consistent within this poem, the beginning (lines 1–6) and end (23–27) are Emegir while the middle (7–22) is composed mostly in Emesal. In light of this, some scholars have assumed that the poem presents male and female alternating speakers – variously identified as king Šu-Sin, Kubatum, Abi-šimti, and a choir of court singers. However, Sefati points out that the connection of dialect with the gender of the speaker is not consistently maintained in Sumerian love songs.[38] Sefati sees the poem as a monologue given by one of Šu-Sin's concubines.

The poem begins with a comparison of Kubatum with Šu-Sin's mother, Abi-šimti. Abi-šimti is described as a cloth-beam – the rod that holds the finished fabric coming off a loom – while Kubatum is pictured as the warp-beam, which is at the back of the loom and anchors the vertical threads that will eventually support the filler, or woof, threads. In other words, Abi-šimti has completed her role as queen by providing a child who assumed the throne and Kubatum has just begun this process with the birth of her first

36 In the ancient Near East there was not a strict divide between what we would term religious and secular poetry. Scholars used to argue for this divide but few do today. See Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Love Lyrics from the Ancient Near East," *CANE* 4 (1995): 2471–2484 (maintaining the division of liturgical/non-liturgical texts); Jacob Klein and Yitschak Sefati, "'Secular' Love Songs in Mesopotamian Literature," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies . . . Presented to Shalom M. Paul . . .*, vol. 2 (ed. Chaim Cohen *et al.*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 613–626 (still maintaining the sacred/secular divide, but note the quotation marks); Martti Nissinen, "Akkadian Rituals and Poetry of Divine Love," in *Mythology and Mythologies* (Melammu Symposia 2; The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 93–136 (demonstrates the anachronistic nature of a sacred/secular divide).

37 Martti Nissinen, "Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu: An Assyrian Song of Songs?," in *"Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf": Studien . . . für Oswald Loretz . . .*. (ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper; AOAT 250; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 585–634.

38 Yitzhak Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998), 340.

child. Gift-giving and festivities would naturally surround a royal birth and Kubatum thanks Šu-Sin for gifts of jewelry and she compares the genitalia of "my god, the inn-keeper" to the sweetness of beer which will be consumed in copious amounts at the feasts and drinking parties to follow. The poem ends with words of praise for the king.

The rubric at the end of the poem indicates the genre of the composition as a "balbale." It is not entirely clear what constituted a balbale but the themes that commonly occur within them are love, courtship, sacred marriage, and agricultural fertility.[39] This poem is linked with Baba, who could be seen as the goddess of Lagaš. Alternatively, it may be that Baba is a secondary image of the love goddess Inanna and the author of this composition dedicated it to her.[40]

Šu-Sin A is only one of a rich collection of love poems from Mesopotamia. Most of the compositions are written as first-person accounts, or contain first-person sections, which feature female speakers. In light of this, scholars such as William Hallo and Thorkild Jacobsen speculate that much, if not most, of Mesopotamian love poetry was written by female authors.[41]

1–6 (Emegir dialect)
She who is ritually pure gave birth. She who is ritually pure gave birth.
The queen who is ritually pure gave birth.
Abi-šimti who is ritually pure gave birth.
The queen who is ritually pure gave birth.
My cloth-beam (wrapped in) a fine cloth, my Abi-šimti.
My warp-beam on which cloth is anchored, my lady, Kubatum.

7–22 (Emesal dialect)
My one of beautiful hair, my one displayed for admiration, my lord Šu-Sin.
My one from Enlil's word, my Šulgi's son.
Because I spoke, because I spoke, the lord gave me a gift.
Because I exclaimed, the lord gave me a gift –
a golden pin, a lapis-lazuli seal. The lord gave me a gift –
a golden ring, a silver ring. The lord gave me a gift.
O lord, your gifts are full of allure. May you lift your eyes to me.
O Šu-Sin, your gifts are full of allure. May you lift your eyes to me.

(the next two lines are broken)

May your city stretch out hands to you like a cripple, my lord Šu-Sin.
May it lie at your feet like a lion cub, my Šulgi's son.
My god, the innkeeper, sweet is her beer.
Like beer, her vulva is sweet, sweet is her beer.

39 Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature*, 21–29.
40 Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature*, 149–150.
41 Hallo, *Origins*, 267.

Like her mouth, her vulva is sweet, sweet is her beer.
Her beer mixed with water, sweet is her beer.

23–28 (Emegir dialect)
O Šu-Sin, who pleasures me,
who pleasures me and is good to me.
O Šu-Sin, who pleasures me.
Beloved of Enlil, my Šu-Sin,
My king, god of the land.
A *balbale* song relating to Baba.

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5.3.5 A Wedding Song (Šu-Sin B)

Several scholars, including Thorkild Jacobsen and Shalom Paul, have identified Kubatum as the author of this song. Apart from a couple of minor elements, this composition is written in the Emesal dialect. The deity Lama mentioned in line 24 was a protective deity, like a guardian angel. There are other wedding songs that are similar to this one and Jacobsen speculated that Kubatum could have authored them all. This opinion is not widely accepted, however.

1–4
Man of my heart, my beloved.
Your charm is delightful, sweet as honey.

Darling of my heart, my beloved.
Your charm is delightful, sweet as honey.

5–8
You have seized me, yet freely I go to you.
Man, let me follow you to the bed.
You have seized me, yet freely I go to you.
Darling, let me follow you to the bed.

9–14
Man, I will ply you with charm.
My treasure, I will bring you honey
in the bedroom oozing honey.
Let us enjoy your charm.
Darling, I will ply you with charm.
My treasure, I will bring you honey.

15–21
Man, you who are charmed by me,
speak to my mother and I will be yours
and give my father gifts.
As for joy, I know how to provide joy –
Man, lie in our house until evening.
As for happiness, I know the way to your heart –
Dear, lie in our house until evening.

22–23
You, ever since you loved me,
Dear, if only you would give me your goodness.

24–30
My lord-god, my lord-Lama,
Šu-Sin, who makes Enlil's heart feel good,
if only you would give me your goodness.
Your place is good honey, if only you would put your hand on it.
Put a hand on it for me like a rope on a basket;
lay a hand on it for me like a rope on an old basket.
– One of Inanna's *balbale*-songs.

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5.3.6 Death of Ur-Namma and his Descent to the Underworld

This hymn recounts the death of a king of the Ur III empire, Ur-Namma (ca. 2112–2095). The hymn begins with his death during combat. His troops brought his body to the royal palace at Ur and from there Ur-Namma made his journey to the Netherworld. It was tough and arduous but he led a caravan over difficult terrain to the entrance of the underworld, which was guarded by seven porters. He gave them each presents and threw a huge banquet for its prominent inhabitants. The banquet lasted for a week, during which he presented offerings to various deities who held sway in that place. After it was over, Ur-Namma's heart turned to lament. In particular, Ur-Namma voices sadness at leaving his wife a widow in the land of the living. Because of this some scholars have posited that Ur-Namma's wife wrote this hymn. Yet, there is no colophon or other internal evidence that indicates this composition was authored by a female.[42] And certainly a male writer with any skill would be able to imagine a widow's sorrow. Nonetheless, we have included this hymn within this anthology since it seems plausible that a female wrote it.

There are a number of versions of this hymn that date from the Old Babylonian period (there are no extant versions from the Ur III period). At times the versions are substantially different from one another. Whether these differences result from deviations from one single "original" version of the hymn or if they preserve independent and co-existing hymnic traditions is impossible to tell from the data we have. Whatever the case may be regarding that issue, we are unable to reconstruct an "original" edition of this hymn.[43] The translation we offer below is of a version of the hymn

42 Claus Wilcke put forward this idea ("Eine Schicksalsentscheidung für den toten Ur-Nammu," in *Actes de la XVIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Université Libre de Bruxelles 30 Juin-4 Juillet 1969* [ed. André Finet; Ham-sur-Heure: Comité belge de recherches en Mésopotamie, 1970], 86) and William W. Hallo entertained it (*Origins*, 266).

43 Niek Veldhuis, review of *Urnamma of Ur in Sumerian Literary Tradition* by Esther Flückiger-Hawker, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122.1 (2002): 128.

(*Ur-Namma A*) from Nippur. The hymn begins with the chaos – both human and divine – resulting from king Ur-Namma's death.

1–7
. . . the entire land . . . beaten. The palace was overwhelmed . . . fear spread through the people's abodes . . . pillaged places . . . in Sumer . . . The cities and everything else was destroyed. The people were afraid. Criminality descended upon Ur and made the loyal shepherd leave. It made the loyal shepherd leave. It made the loyal shepherd, Ur-Namma, leave.

8–14
For An formed entirely different words . . . became empty for Enlil falsely changed the fate he decided. Ninmah lamented for her . . . Enki closed Eridu's large door. Nudimmud went into his bedroom and laid down in fasting. With the words of An, Nanna screwed her face at their zenith. Utu did not come out; the day hung in lament. Because of the fate decided for Ur-Namma, because it made the loyal shepherd leave, she wept uncontrollably in the wide street – normally a place of fun.

15–21
The mother was having a terrible life because of her son, the mother of the king, the pure Ninsun said, "My heart!" Since humanity could not sleep . . . they spent their time in lament over the loyal shepherd who was taken from them.

22–30
A flood filled the canals and the canal inspector tried to alleviate it, but the yield of barley growing in the communal lands – the life of the Land – fell. The farmers' personal fields also had small yields. Enkimdu, the chief of levees and irrigation ditches, removed levees and ditches from Ur. [*One line is broken.*] Agricultural knowhow and . . . of the Land disappeared. Crops became sparse. The steppe no longer grew sweet grass; it grew grasses of lament. Cows . . . their pen was destroyed. Their calves . . . give forlorn bleats.

31–38
The wise shepherd . . . no longer instructs . . . in battle or combat. The king, champion of Sumer, symbol of the assembly, Ur-Namma, champion of Sumer, symbol of the assembly, leader of Sumer, lies ill. His hands that used to clench no longer clench. He lies ill. His feet . . . no longer step. He lies ill. [*One line is broken.*]

39–51
The loyal shepherd, king, great sword of Sumer, Ur-Namma, king of the Land, was taken to lie in state. He was taken to Ur; Ur-Namma, was brought

to the viewing place. The proud one lay in his palace. Ur-Namma, beloved of his troops, could no longer lift his head. The wise one . . . lay down and silence descended. The pride of the Land had fallen. Like a flattened mountain, like a clear-cut cypress forest, his character changed. Like a box tree, they put an ax to him in his joyous dwelling. Like a fresh cedar he was uprooted in his sleeping(?) palace. His spouse . . . covered by a storm; it clung to her like a wife to her sweetheart. His appointed day arrived. He went away in his prime.

52–61
Sacrifice was no longer accepted as good but passed over as deficient. The Anuna gods refused his gifts. An did not . . . complete his day. At the order of Enlil there was no more lifting up; his beloved men became estranged from their wise one. Strangers turned into . . . Thus, like a wicked place Ur-Namma was discarded like a broken jar. His radiance like a cloud . . . He does not . . . nor does he accept . . . Ur-Namma, sigh, what is he to me?

62–75
Ur-Namma, son of Nin-sumun, was brought to Arali, the foremost place of the Land, in his prime. The soldiers escorting the king shed tears. Like in a land as foreign as Dilmun, their boat (Ur-Namma) sunk . . . was cut. Oars, poles, rudders, were stripped from it . . . its bolt was cut . . . it stood in bitter dust. His donkeys dwelled with the king; the donkeys were buried there. Ur-Namma dwelled with his donkeys; the donkeys were buried there. As he crossed over the Land . . . the Land became estranged from its pride. The journey to the Netherworld is a lonely path. On account of the king, the chariots were covered, the roads were overgrown, they were unusable. On account of Ur-Namma the chariots were covered over, the roads were overgrown, they were unusable.

76–87
He gave gifts to the seven chief doormen of the Netherworld. The deceased kings of renown, along with deceased IŠIB priests, LUMAH priests, and NINDIGIR priestesses, all chosen by extispicy, announced the king's entrance to the people. A cry rang out in the Netherworld. The king killed bulls and slaughtered sheep. Ur-Namma set up an enormous meal. The food of the Netherworld is bitter; the water of the Netherworld is brackish. The loyal shepherd had a deep knowledge concerning the rites of the Netherworld. The king gave an offering of food to the Netherworld. Ur-Namma gave an offering of food to the Netherworld: as many unblemished bulls, unblemished goats, and fattened sheep as could be brought.

88–91
A weapon, a large bow with a quiver of arrows, a dagger with an elaborate blade, and a colorful messenger bag, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Nergal, the Enlil of the Netherworld, in his palace.

92–96
A spear, a saddle bag, a divine lion-headed lance, a standing shield, a heroic truncheon, an axe – Ereškigala's favorite, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Gilgameš, king of the underworld, in his palace.

97–101
. . . filled with oil, an expertly made flask, a thick garment, a garment made of fleece, a queen's fleece robe . . ., the divine presence of the Netherworld, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Ereškigala, the mother of Ninazu, in her palace.

102–105
Sheep, . . ., a royal golden scepter, a lapis-lazuli hand . . ., the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Dumuzid, the beloved husband of Inanna, in his palace.

106–109
A wonderfully wrought clasp, a gold ring, a barge . . ., and a pure carnelian stone – a broach for the gods, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Namtar, the one decreeing fate, in his palace.

110–113
A chest with a lapis-lazuli handle (filled with) supplies for the Underworld, a silver hairpin adorned with lapis-lazuli, and a lady's comb, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to Hušbisag, the wife of Namtar, in his palace.

114–122
A chariot with gold-plated . . . wheels, donkeys, horses . . . donkeys with speckled thighs . . . followed by . . . shepherds and herdsmen, the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to the valiant hero Ningišzida in his palace. A lapis-lazuli seal hanging from a pen knife and a silver and gold toggle-pin with a bison head he gave to Dimpimekug who stands by his side.

123–128
A sage's headdress with outstanding ear flaps of alabaster, a . . . stylus, scribal supplies, a lapis-lazuli surveying line, a measuring rod . . ., the shepherd Ur-Namma offered to (Ningišzida's) spouse Ninazimua, the outstanding scribe, offspring of Arali, in her palace.

129–131
A . . ., he offered the great . . . of the Netherworld . . .

132–144
After the king presented to the Netherworld the requisite offerings, after Ur-Namma presented to the Netherworld the requisite offerings . . . of the Underworld . . . seated Ur-Namma on a great throne of the Netherworld and erected a dwelling place for him in the Netherworld. At the instruction of Ereškigala all the troops who had died in combat and all guilty people were given to the king. Ur-Namma . . ., along with his beloved brother Gilgameš, they will announce the decisions of the Netherworld and will give the judgments of the Netherworld.

145–154
On the seventh day (of Ur-Namma's journey to the Netherworld), ten days had passed (since the king had died): My king was sorrowful over Sumer; Ur-Namma was sorrowful over Sumer. He was unable to complete the wall of Ur. He wasn't able to enjoy the new palace he had built. The shepherd could no longer . . . his house. He could not embrace his wife, he could not raise sons on his knees, and he would not see his young daughters attain their beauty. My king's heart was full of tears.

155–165
The loyal shepherd . . . a lament for himself: "I, who have undergone this, served the gods. I made spaces for them. To the Anuna gods I gave abundance. I placed treasure on their beds covered with plants and lapis-lazuli. No god got up to console my heart. Because of them, anything that could have been a good sign for me was as distant as the heavens . . . what is my reward for serving in those days? Sleepless nights of service resulted in an untimely death. Like rain that cannot go back to the heavens, ugh, I cannot go back to brick-built Ur.

166–186
Now my wife is widowed. She suffers each day in lament and ill-humor. My strength is gone . . . the hero . . . the hand of fate . . . like a wild bull . . . like a mighty ox . . . like a sprout . . . like a donkey . . . I died . . . my wife . . . suffers each day in lament and ill-humor. Her benevolent protective angel does not care for her anymore. Ninsumun no longer places her majestic arm on her head. Nanna, lord Ašimbabbar, no longer takes her hand. Enki, king of Eridu, does not . . . she can no longer answer. She is like a boat adrift in a fierce storm; the mooring-pole was not strong enough. Like a donkey trapped in a pit, she has endured a heavy hand. Like a lion in a trap, a guard has been set for her. Like a dog in a cage, she is silenced. Utu . . . does not pay attention to the cries: "My king!"

187–197
My *tigi* drum, *adab* drum, reed instrument, and *zamzam* instrument play laments. The instruments of the music hall are leaned against the wall. My throne whose beauty was endless, is now a dust-filled pit ... A bed, a sleeping place, for me is now gone. I must sleep in the barren steppe. Sigh, my wife and children lament in tears. The people I used to command sing like lamenters and mourners. Preeminent Inanna, the martial lady, was not there at my verdict. Enlil sent her to foreign lands as a messenger.

198–216
When she returned from there Inanna respectfully entered the shining Ekur. She trembled before Enlil's furrowed brow: "Great lady of the Eanna, when someone is bent ... The loyal shepherd left the Eanna; you cannot see him anymore." My lady ... Inanna, the angry storm, oldest child of Sîn ... made the heavens tremble and made the earth shake. Inanna destroyed the cattle pens and burned the sheepfolds. "An, king of the gods, trembled at my insults. If Enlil pardons someone, who can change it? The words of An the king, who can change these magnificent words? If the plans are put onto the Land, and people buck them, there will be no abundance at the divine sunrise. My pure *gipar*, the Eanna shrine, is destroyed like a mountain. If only my shepherd could have entered it before his prime. If only my strong one could grow for me like scrub in the desert. If only he could hold still like a boat in a peaceful quay." This is how Inanna lamented for him.

(Lines 217–243 continue this lament for Ur-Namma but are highly broken.)

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CHAPTER 6

Letters

Archaeologists and clandestine diggers have pulled thousands upon thousands of ancient letters from the soil of the Middle East. Over 3,300 letters are extant from the Neo-Assyrian period alone.[1] Just like today, separated lovers wrote to one another, business partners in different locales communicated with each other, scouts and servants reported to kings, and generals placed orders into the hands of trusted couriers. Letters are one of the few avenues through which one can attempt to reach the lived experience and emotions of individuals in antiquity. It is also one of the most frustrating genres to study because many letters relate to circumstances that are known to both the sender and the addressee but which remain a mystery to the modern reader.

After the letters were read, or in most cases after a scribe read a letter out loud to the recipient, some letters were kept within archives but many others were discarded or used as fill in building projects. Most of the letters in this anthology can be placed within a larger context; in other words, they were discovered as part of an archive or they can be identified as originating from a specific place, such as the Assyrian trading colony in Kanesh. In many instances single letters from otherwise unknown individuals have been found. Since letters were written or dictated by specific people and sent to address particular situations and individuals they are the products of individual agency. Yet, in rare cases, a particularly beautiful letter could be integrated into the literary canon and as it was preserved through recopying it could take on a facet of instrumental agency.

The first, and oldest, letter in this collection is from the Ur III period (2100–2000 BCE) and might have been used as a model letter within scribal schools. Whether it is a real letter – if the purported sender actually commissioned it – or was created as a model with which to train scribes is uncertain. The first letters that were undisputedly written by women date from 2000–1600 BCE. This span of time is usually referred to as the Old

1 Raija Mattila and Jouni Harjumäki, "Change or Chance? Studying Change in Neo-Assyrian Administration," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 21 (2015 theme issue: Change in Neo-Assyrian Imperial Administration: Evolution and Revolution, ed. May & Svärd): 11–20.

Babylonian period in southern Mesopotamia and the Old Assyrian period in the northern parts of Mesopotamia. This does not mean that there would have been consistent Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian kingdoms; rather, the terms refer to the dialects of Akkadian used in these areas. In fact, the exact chains of historical events are difficult to determine. Generally speaking, the period is characterized by many city-states and shifting alliances. In the southern parts of Mesopotamia there were several power centers, including the cities of Isin, Larsa, Ur, and of course Babylon. In the north the city-states of Ešnunna and Assur wielded influence. In the west the city-states of Mari and Aleppo were important centers. Additionally, during this time the prominence of a people called Amorites increases in Mesopotamia. These turbulent centuries yielded the majority of the female letters of Mesopotamia.

Out of all the text genres presented in this volume, letters are by far the most numerous and a selection of them had to be made. The letters in this chapter are organized roughly in chronological and geographical order, starting with the oldest. After a Sumerian letter, the Old Assyrian letters are presented first. They form a distinct category because the texts were all found in the city of Kanesh and form a relatively homogenous group chronologically.

Next, a selection of Old Babylonian letters is translated. The Old Babylonian material is presented under three separate headings. First, letters authored by a very specific category of women, the *nadītum*, often translated as "priestess." These women existed in several locations, mostly in southern Mesopotamia. The largest concentration of textual evidence relating to their activities comes from the city of Sippar. Second, a selection of letters from a remarkable palace archive excavated from Mari (modern Tell Hariri in Syria), located well to the west of "Mesopotamia proper" are presented. Third, we have chosen a selection of other Old Babylonian letters that indicate that the palace women of Mari and the *nadītum* of southern Mesopotamia were not an exception – during the Old Babylonian period other women also wrote letters. Each section begins with a brief introduction.

Although numbers can never be totally conclusive (there are always new finds, new publications, and there is always the chance that we as authors could have missed some sources), our rough numerical estimate is that Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian letters written by women number about 200–250. In comparison, the centuries after the Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian periods offer a pitifully small number of letters from women. As far as we currently know, women appear as writers of letters only in four compositions from the Middle Assyrian correspondence (ca. 1400–1050) and in seven letters from the Neo-Assyrian era (934–612). From the Neo-Babylonian Empire (612–539) fourteen letters from women are known to us. Thus, against the many female letters from the years 2000–1600, we are faced with fewer than thirty from the rest of Mesopotamian history from

1600 to 539. Nonetheless, the relative paucity of female letters could be partially illusory. From the Neo-Babylonian period there might be more letters identified in the coming years of research, since there are still numerous untranslated texts. However, the Neo-Assyrian material is by now well published and the number of letters written by women, seven, can be stated confidently. The letters that we translate here include some of the extant letters that have been preserved well enough to be intelligible. Following the conventional letter formula, we systematically translate the Akkadian *umma* as the expression "the following is dictated by" but the reader should be aware that it is quite possible that some of these women were literate themselves and could have actually written the letter themselves, not merely dictated it to a scribe. Especially some of the letters from Old Assyrian women and the letters sent from abroad to Mari (esp. letters by Kirû) could have been written by the women themselves.

6.1 A Sumerian Letter

6.1.1 Letter from an Angry Wife

In this letter a wife sends a message to her husband defending her actions while he was away (possibly he was attending to business at the Šara temple at Umma, see lines 22–23 and Owen p. 201). Apparently, he heard rumors that she was mismanaging their household and leveled this accusation against her. She denies that anything has left their estate apart from necessary expenditures. She did note that the workers had relocated their store of barley that they were planning to use as seed. The wife asks the husband if he had contracted with a certain individual, Lu-Nanna, to do the sowing or whether she needed to make other arrangements.

This letter is written in Sumerian and was likely composed in the Ur III period (ca. 2100–2000 BCE). Where it was written is unknown. Some scholars think that this is a model letter that would be used to teach scribal students rather than a letter that was actually sent. They point out that the addressee identified in line 1 and the name in line 22 could be either personal names or place-holding epithets. Furthermore, the content of the letter deals with issues mentioned in sections 141–143 of the Laws of Hammurapi. These facts do not seem very persuasive. The scholar who originally published this text did not think that the names should be regarded as epithets and it is not surprising that the content of a letter would touch upon topics addressed in the Laws of Hammurapi. If this was an actual letter, the wife probably wrote it with the help of a scribe.

1–2
To Kiaga say:

3–5
Why on account of the children does he accuse me?

6–11
Have I withheld even one piece of bread or twenty liters of flour in a leather bag? Whatever barley is in the house has not been withheld by the woman. There is no cause for worry about his storehouse; I have not entered it. Yet if I had, would I be squandering our possessions which he has acquired? I took only eleven pieces of beer-bread which were in our estate and gave them to the household.

12–17
As for the barley for seed-plowing, the workers hauled it off. There is no more barley in the house. I spoke to Lu-Nanna about the field and he said to me, "I will give it (the barley) to you." If he (Kiaga) has not put the field into his (Lu-Nanna's) hand I will have to get a different seed-plower for myself.

18–21
As for the oxen, let him (Kiaga) send me a helper. There isn't any barley in the house with me. He needs to deliver barley to me. It is imperative. He needs to bring it to me.

22–23
Igidu said to me, "The messenger of the god Šara has taken him." May you not hold him up. Let him come to me.

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Translation: William W. Hallo, *COS* 3.130.

6.2 Old Assyrian Letters

The Old Assyrian period is named after the Old Assyrian dialect. It is the oldest layer of the Assyrian dialect (see more information on dialects of Akkadian in chapter 1). The dialect, in turn, was named after the city-state of Assur, one of the most ancient and influential cities of the Northern

Mesopotamia. Assur existed even before Old Assyrian period, but seems to have been a small player in the Mesopotamian political map. However, after the year 2000 BCE the city-state managed to build up an extensive trade network becoming the regional focal point in the trade of tin. This transformation was helped by its strategic location along the trade routes. The city was located on the west bank of Tigris, about 100 km south of the modern city of Mosul. Later, during the Middle Assyrian era (roughly 1500–1000) the city was the center of a small kingdom, which gradually mutated into the mighty Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–612). In the beginning of the seventh century, this empire ruled an area from the Persian Gulf all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

During the Old Assyrian period Assur was ruled by a very savvy local dynasty. The ruler was called a "vicegerent of the god Aššur" (the main city god), not a king, and it does not seem that he was an autocratic ruler. Rather, he shared his power with a city council, most probably consisting of heads of the most influential families. As so often happens, their economic success attracted unwanted attention and the neighboring ruler, King Šamši-Adad I (1813–1781), conquered the area probably around the year 1800. Assur was not the only city to fall under his rule. Šamši-Adad I was very successful in bringing under his control practically all of northern Mesopotamia. However, his empire proved short-lived and fell apart soon after he died.

The Old Assyrian merchants had a flourishing trading quarter in the city of Kanesh, located in Anatolia. The trading post existed already long before the Assyrian archives but the texts excavated from there come from a fairly specific point in time. The 22,500 clay tablets found at Kanesh are roughly datable to the nineteenth century BCE. Only about half of these tablets are published and it is possible that up to 30–40 per cent of the materials in the archive are letters.

Business in the Kanesh trading quarter was carried out by agents who worked on behalf of merchant families based about 1,000 km away in Assur. These agents were originally from Assur themselves and they were sent to live as expatriates in far-flung outposts. They kept in touch with their business associates and families through letters. It seems that many of the merchants could write these letters themselves, quite possibly including female merchants. Letters were carried in the trade caravans that frequently traveled back and forth from Assur and Kanesh. Donkeys carrying tin and textiles spent five to six weeks journeying from Assur to Kanesh and then carried the proceeds from the sale of these goods – silver and gold – back to Assur.

The textiles in these trade caravans were often provided by women of the family. In most cases it was the wife who was living in Assur who sent textiles through the trade network to Kanesh and other faraway locations. In most cases the women in Assur weaved the cloth themselves but on occasion they employed slaves or contract spinners, weavers, and dyers. The silver they

received from their work, or from organizing the work and delivery, belonged to them, as it looks like spouses had separate accounts. In addition to trading in textiles, these wives also kept up the familial estates and defended the interests of the family in Assur.

The women in these archives were business women, eager to realize profits. They cannot be seen as mere extensions of their husbands' businesses. Obviously women and men acted as members of the family and clan, but at the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that these women were gaining profits for themselves as well. All in all, as much as they were wives, these women were also business partners with their husbands.

Not all of the women stayed in Assur, though. Some of the senior female family members were present in Kanesh, co-directing the affairs there. Some even traveled to other parts of Anatolia to complete financial transactions. In many of these letters there is a recurring theme: exclamations regarding their poor financial situation. It is unclear how much of this rhetoric should be taken at face value and how often such exclamations are used as motivational tools.

Cécile Michel is the best authority on the topic of Old Assyrian letters and the women who wrote some of them. She edited the female correspondence in her book written in French from 2001 and is currently preparing an English-language volume which includes, in addition to letters, also contracts, incantations, etc. (ca. 300 texts altogether). In her 2001 volume, the female correspondence consists of no less than 102 letters (text nos. 299–400), although only 54 were written or dictated by women. Additionally, Michel presents three more letters written by women in other parts of the book, leaving us with fifty-seven female letters. This is not the total sum of all Old Assyrian letters authored by women[2] but this corpus gives a comprehensive overall image of the activities and concerns of the Old Assyrian merchant women. We selected three representative letters for translation.

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2 See for example Michel, "Akkadian Texts – Women in Letters" for two interesting letters not included in this volume as well as English translations of text nos. 302, 306, 320, 348, and 352.

Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité (ed. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, Saba Farès, Brigitte Lion, and Cécile Michel; Topoi Supplément 10; Lyon: Diffusion De Boccard, 2009); Allison Karmel Thomason, "Her Share of the Profits: Women, Agency, and Textile Production at Kültepe/Kanesh in the Early Second Millennium BC," in *Textile Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East: Archaeology, Epigraphy, Iconography* (ed. Marie-Louise Nosch, Henriette Koefoed, and Eva Andersson Strand; Ancient Textiles Series 12; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 93–112; Cécile Michel, "Akkadian Texts – Women in letters: Old Assyrian Kaniš," in *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Sourcebook* (ed. Mark Chavalas; Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World; London: Routledge, 2014), 205–212; Cécile Michel, *Women from Aššur and Kaniš According to the Private Archives of the Assyrian Merchants at the Beginning of the IInd Millennium B.C.* (Atlanta: SBL, forthcoming).

6.2.1 Letter by Priestess Ahaha

This letter was sent by a woman called Ahaha, who wrote to her brother Aššur-mutappil. Their father was Pušu-ken and their mother was Lamassi. Apparently Ahaha was raised by her mother in Assur while her father took care of the family business in Kanesh. Eventually she became a priestess (NIN.DINGIR/*ugbabtum*) in accordance with the wishes of her mother. She appears in a number of letters, ten in all, seven of them sent by her (alone or with others). As with most of the letters within the archive at Kanesh, much of her correspondence relates to family affairs and family business. She corresponds with her brothers and conducts her own business by investing money in *naruqqum*-contracts. After the death of her father, she is apparently the person in charge of figuring out the estate and trying to resolve the financial difficulties of the family business.

In the letter Ahaha is writing about considerable sums of money. Since the circumstances surrounding the letter are not known to us, it is not totally clear what is going on here, but certainly Ahaha is writing to her brother in order to defend her financial interests. In the beginning of the letter it seems that she is complaining about a good deal that was snatched from right in front of her. The three culprits mentioned are her brothers (Puzur-Aššur, Buzazu, and Ikuppaša).

A *naruqqum*-contract, which is the main topic of the letter, was a contract between a trader (who actually transported and sold the goods) and an investor in Assur (who gave the capital for the venture). Apparently these were drawn up centrally in Assur under proper authorities. These *naruqqum*-contracts carefully delineated the distribution of profits between the two

parties. The term could also refer to the invested capital. Naturally, there could be more than one investor as is the case here as well.[3]

She seems especially concerned about getting the 10 minas of silver – a huge sum – that Puzur-Aššur owes her, apparently as a result of a *naruqqum*-contract. Discussion on this matter is continued in another letter, where Ahaha writes to her brother Ikuppaša (and two others) regarding her investment in the *naruqqum*-contract of Puzur-Aššur. She is worried that her brother Buzazu considers this investment to be his and asks for help in making sure everyone gets their fair share.[4]

obv. line 1
Speak to (the man) Aššur-mutappil!

obv. line 2
The following is dictated by (the woman) Ahaha.

obv. lines 3–14
I grasped at the silver of the *naruqqum*-contract of (the man) Dan-Aššur, but this is what they said: "(The men) Puzur-Aššur, Buzazu and Ikuppaša took it." While there, make them weigh out the silver and seal (it) so that it may travel here overland under their own name. If [they paid], may your clear letter soon come here, so that I may consider here what is to be considered.

obv. lines 15–16, rev. lines 1–9
I have invested three and a half minas of silver in (the *naruqqum*-contract of) Puzur-Aššur. Apart from that (there is the matter of) 10 minas of silver. Here I have witnesses against him who (can confirm) that upon its (silver's) entering he should deliver (it) to me. When you enter the House of Puzur-Aššur, place this matter before the men who invested in the *naruqqum*-venture.

rev. lines 10–13
You are my brother. If it were not for you, I would have no one. Do not listen to slander from anyone!

rev. lines 13–15, edge lines 1–3
Pay attention to the day when you can do me a favor and the day you can save (me). Forward the 10 minas of silver to me and no-one shall see the day (of my ruin). Aba-šalim is bringing you a belt (as payment?).

3 For more on the topic of *naruqqum* see the primary source for this translation: Cécile Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish au début du IIe millénaire avant J.-C.*, 324–327.

4 See Michel *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish*, text no. 226.

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Text: Cécile Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish au début du IIe millénaire avant J.-C.* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 19; Paris: Lés éditions de cerf, 2001), text no. 225; translation in French and includes a good bibliography. A transliteration is available at http://www.cdli.ucla.edu/P360997.
Cuneiform copy: Julius Lewy, *Die Kültepetexte aus der Sammlung Frida Hahn* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1930), no. 7.
Study: See Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish*, 425–426, 438–439, and indices for further texts regarding this woman.

6.2.2 Letter from Anatolian Secondary Wife Regarding Finances

The women writing from Assur were usually the wives (*aššatum* in Assyrian) of the merchants who oversaw the family estates. Many of the merchant-husbands took a secondary wife (literally "female servant," *amtum* in Assyrian) while they were living at the trading post in the Anatolia. This practice of taking a second wife seems to have been an approved custom among the Assyrians. The exact position of these secondary wives is not fully understood. Apparently she was a full wife and not a slave but her children had fewer rights than the children of the primary wife (the *aššatum*).

She could and did send letters on her own, although only a few are known. One of them is translated here.[5] It was written by a woman named Šišahšušar to her Assyrian husband, Aššur-nada. Aššur-nada had a wife and children in Assur and with Šišahšušar he had two sons and a daughter. Her daughter, Ištar-lamassi, later became a secondary wife for an Assyrian, Puzur-Ištar. Her husband traveled frequently in Anatolia while Šišahšušar took care of the family home in Kanesh. Unlike the wives in Assur, Šišahšušar was a user and receiver of textiles; she did not make them for trade. While this is the only preserved letter written by her, there are other letters written to her that attest to an ongoing correspondence between her and her husband. She is concerned about receiving enough silver to take care of the family house in Kanesh and she relays to her husband the affairs of Kanesh.

The letter here could be best described as a financial report to her husband on how his affairs are being cared for in Kanesh, not unlike modern "quarterly reports." Like the modern financial reports, one

5 For another interesting letter by an *amtum*-wife, see translation in Michel, "Akkadian Texts," 210.

would need to know a lot more about the details of the business in order to fully comprehend the meaning of the missive. Nonetheless, it is clear enough that considerable financial interests are at stake and that Šišahšušar is looking after the family interests. Toward the end of the letter the style becomes more and more concise and consists mostly of sums and names, as if the writer is running out of space. The whole space on the tablet is used, including the edge.

obv. line 1
Speak to (the man) Aššur-nada!

obv. line 2
The following is dictated by (the woman) Šišahšušar.

obv. lines 3–15
Since you departed, they have received 2/3 mina and 5 shekels of silver, which they gave to Uṣur-ša-Aššur, son of Aššur-malik. Uṣur-ša-Aššur took three pieces of *kutānum*-cloth and gave it to the *kārum*-house. They received 12 shekels of silver from Šarabunuwa and they gave it indeed to me. The household of Kudubiš has brought four sacks of grain (which) I have received here: three sacks were for me. The household of Kaubaya has brought three sacks of wheat but they did not give me anything.

obv. lines 16–17, rev. lines 1–4
Since you departed, Aššur-bel-awatim came and portioned out the hides. There was a share (of hides) for you, but he has now carried them away.

rev. lines 4–12
Fifteen shekels of silver of Tarhunu; they owe the rest of the silver. Thereupon they gave to me eight and a quarter shekels of silver but they did not give anything else to me. Furthermore, five shekels of silver are late from Tarhunu. Regarding the rest of the silver, they have given it. They have not received any of your outstanding goods.

rev. lines 12–18, edge 1–4
Uṣur-ša-Aššur is following your instructions. Now, three months have passed. He did not buy timber from Mama, I myself bought (it). We have received one and two-thirds minas and five shekels of silver from Habî and Uṣur-ša-Aššur took (it). We have taken two-thirds mina from Hakule and five shekels of silver (from/to?) Uṣur-ša-Aššur.

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6.2.3 Letter to a Sister About Finances

The woman named Muša was engaged in active correspondence with Lamaša. Conventions of epistolary formulas are significant for interpreting this letter. Old Assyrian letters address the recipients in the order of importance, recognizing social status, age, and sex of the individuals, usually placing men before women. Women are placed first rarely; the known cases include a man writing to an older woman, and another case of a sister who is a priestess. Muša is one of the few women who are addressed first in the letters. This speaks of her high status. One should also note that the beginning of the letter is non-standard. It looks like Lamaša was planning to write to Muša and Pušu-ken, both residing in Kanesh, but changed her mind and decided that the message was better addressed to Muša alone. Lamaša frequently writes to these individuals, apparently from somewhere in Anatolia. She is known as the author of three letters and receiver of four.

Many of the items mentioned in the letter are poorly understood. In the case of *mamirum*, it is not clear at all what kind of an item it was and in some other translations an amount of uncertainty is present.

obv. lines 1–2
Speak to (the woman) Muša and to (the man) Pušu-ken. To (the woman) Muša!

obv. line 3
The following is dictated by (the woman) Lamaša.

obv. lines 4–12, rev. line 1
Three bronze tongs, three knives, three forks, two bronze spoons, two *supānum*-bowls, (one) *mamirum*, three copper axes, (one) bronze axe, four

arzallum-tools, and one *ṣīrum*-vessel weighing twenty minas: all this I gave to you. You are my sister. Entrust these (things) (to) Pušu-ken over there.

rev. lines 2–13, side lines 1–3
Regarding those utensils: They have been with me for eight years. At the moment, (there are) additionally seven padded pack-saddles, of which three pack-saddles you gave to Peruwa; rest of the pack-saddles (go) to Arna. And give my two sealed containers to Pušu-ken. And the *ṣīrum*-vessel and the additional merchandise (which) I left with you, give them to him too. You are my sister, report whatever furnishing you have given to him.

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Text: Cécile Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish au début du IIe millénaire avant J.-C.* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 19; Paris: Lés éditions de cerf, 2001), no. 369; this includes a translation in French and a good bibliography. A transliteration and the cuneiform copy (according to Sidney Smith, *Cuneiform Texts from Cappadocian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol. 4, [London: British Museum, 1927], text no. 20) are available at www.cdli.ucla.edu/P358663.
Studies: Cécile Michel, *Correspondance des marchands de Kanish*, 482–489 and 426 for the family of Pušu-ken.

6.3 Old Babylonian Letters of the *nadītum*

A remarkable tradition existed in Old Babylonian times by which some elite women were dedicated to a god by their families instead of marrying them off as was the usual custom. These women were present in many cities of southern Mesopotamia. The *nadītum*-women that we know the most about were located in the city of Sippar. This is why we discuss them first.

There were actually two ancient cities named Sippar, located on different banks of the Euphrates river. Modern Tell Abu Habbah was the ancient Sippar-Yahrurum, city of sun god Šamaš. On the other bank, the modern Tell ed-Der was known as Sippar-Amnânum, the home of the cult of goddess Annunitim. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to decide which location is meant when scribes refer to Sippar. The most important community of Old Babylonian *nadītum*-priestesses resided in Sippar-Yahrurum, all of them dedicated to Šamaš. On the other side of the river, it seems that a less well-known group of women, titled *kulmašītum*, was dedicated to Annunitim.

In Sippar, the institution which housed the *nadītum* was called in Akkadian the *gagûm*. Rivkah Harris translated this word as "cloister" although she does

note that "[T]his term has certain implications which are not valid for the ancient institution."[6] It is precisely for this reason that we have chosen to use the ancient term *gagûm* and explain here what exactly the term implies. In a nutshell, *gagûm* in Sippar referred to a compound housing about a hundred women belonging to the Old Babylonian elite. Other *gagûm* institutions are known to have existed in Kish, Nippur, Ishchali, and even as far as Elam, which was east of the Mesopotamian heartland in what is now Iran. However, the Sippar texts regarding the *nadītum*-priestesses of Šamaš are the most extensive. As for letters, there are more than eighty letters that were sent by women found from Sippar. How many of them were sent by *nadītum*-priestesses is unclear, but it seems probable that a significant portion of them were. The letters include also one which was sent by a *qadištum* (written NU.GIG).[7]

Perhaps the main reason why *gagûm* has so often been translated as "cloister" is that the *nadītum* of Sippar were not permitted to have children. Furthermore, *nadītum* were apparently initiated to the temple with the same terminology that was used for a bride entering the house of her father-in-law. Etymologically the term *gagûm* has connotations of a shut-in space; however, *nadītum*-women were not completely removed from the rest of society. There is a clear distinction made between *gagûm* ("cloister") and *kīdu* ("outside the cloister") but at the same time there are explicit documents stating that *nadītum*-women were able to visit relatives and that people visited them as well.

The administrative officials of the *gagûm* included stewards, gate guards, scribes, and a judge. In addition, there were servants taking care of more menial tasks. These individuals included both men and women. Within the *gagûm* complex, each *nadītum*-woman maintained her own household. Such households could be rather large in some cases, including administrators and menials, although it is improbable that all the people working for her would have lived in the same house with her.

The households of the *nadītum*-women were expected to be self-sustaining and most of the texts relating to the *gagûm* concern their financial activities. Some of the women functioned as scribes. Eight of them are known. The cultic duties of *nadītum*-women are unclear, but from their letters it is apparent that their function was to guarantee the good will of the deity toward their whole family. Presumably this included ritual activities but the precise nature of them is unknown. Apparently there were many customs and conventions associated with *nadītum* life. For

6 Rivkah Harris, "The Organization and Administration of the Cloisters in Ancient Babylonia," *JESHO* 6 (1963): 121–122.

7 The number is based on a textual and prosopographical database, which was elaborated at the research unit Assyriology and History of the Ancient Near East at Ghent University and currently contains more than 9,000 published as well as unpublished Old Babylonian administrative, economic, and legal texts and letters from Sippar. We want to offer our heartfelt thanks to Professor Katrien De Graef for providing us with this information.

instance, becoming *nadītum* was a family tradition. Often times women from the same family (on the paternal side, i.e., a *nadītum*'s brother's daughters) joined their ranks.

The Laws of Hammurapi contain many stipulations concerning these women, for example giving them in some cases an inheritance equal to that of a son (normally a woman did not inherit property). Although the Laws of Hammurapi did not necessarily reflect social reality in every regard, such provisions nonetheless indicate the remarkable position of these women.

Another prominent location where *nadītum*-women resided was Nippur. Unlike in Sippar, where most of the tablets were probably found from a small area,[8] the Nippur texts were spread all over Nippur. This means that the prominence of *nadītum* in the texts found from Nippur cannot be attributed to chance – these women clearly were an important part of the Nippur elite. The *nadītum* in Nippur were dedicated to the god Ninurta and they, like the *nadītum* of Sippar, engaged in many business activities. In Nippur their home was called "the place of the *nadītum* (KI.LUKUR.RA)."

Lucile Barberon studied the female cultic functionaries of Marduk in Babylonia and concluded that the *nadītum* of Marduk were present in many cities. They were of course present in Babylon, where Marduk reigned as the supreme god, but they were also located in Damrum, Dilbat, Kish, Lagaba, Sippar, Ṣubur-Šubula, Isin, Nippur, and 'Usiyeh. The *nadītum* of Marduk differ from other groups of *nadītum* since they apparently did not live in a community and they could marry by offering a substitute – a servant wife – to their husband's bed.

In addition to the male gods already mentioned, *nadītum* were dedicated to Zababa in Kish, to the moon god Nanna/Sîn in Damrum, to Uraš in Dilbat, and to god of the underworld Nergal in Maškan-šapir. At least in Kish (like in Sippar-Yahrurum and Nippur) these women lived in "gated communities" of some kind. Other Old Babylonian female cultic personnel are known as well. The *kulmašītum* (NU.BAR) women are an interesting group since they served a goddess, the tutelary deity of Sippar-Amnânum named Annunitim. Finally, women termed *qadištum*, apparently always dedicated to serving Adad, are known from many cities.

Bibliography

Rivkah Harris has done the most extensive work on the subject of the *nadītum*-women of Sippar. See especially: "Biographical Notes on the naditu Women of Sippar," *JCS* 16.1 (1962): 1–12; "The Organization and Administration of the Cloisters in Ancient Babylonia" *JESHO* 6 (1963): 121–157; "The naditu-woman," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim*

8 However, see Katrien De Graef, "Puppets on a String? On Female Agency in Old Babylonian Economy," in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

(ed. Robert D. Biggs *et al.*; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), 106–135; *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894–1595 B.C.)* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archäologisch Instituut, 1975), 305ff; "Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?," in *Women's Earliest Records: From Egypt and Western Asia* (ed. Barbara S. Lesko; Brown Judaic Studies 166; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 145–156 and responses, 157–165.
See also: Elisabeth C. Stone, "The Social Role of the Naditu Women in Old Babylonian Nippur," *JESHO* 25 (1982): 50–70; Ulla Jeyes, "The Nadītu Women of Sippar," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt; London: Croom Helm, 1983), 260–272; Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (Archibab 1; Mémoires de NABU 14; Paris: SEPOA, 2012) and Katrien De Graef, "Puppets on a String? On Female Agency in Old Babylonian Economy," in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

6.3.1 Letter from Iltani and Gullubtum

A *nadītum* named Iltani was the daughter of a Babylonian king, either Samsu-iluna (ca. 1749) or Abi-ešuh (ca. 1711). This princess is the wealthiest and best known *nadītum* from the community in Sippar-Yahrurum. Iltani is known from several texts, one of which is offered here in translation. In this letter Iltani's full title is not mentioned but it is probable that the author is the princess Iltani because of the other people mentioned in the letter. It is known that princess Iltani lent barley to Namram-šarur, son of Sîn-iddinam, and it seems plausible that these are the same persons mentioned in this letter.

The letter includes a message from lady Gullubtum who likely resided in the same *gagûm* as Iltani. It seems that Iltani is acting here as a go-between. Her words open the letter politely but she immediately lets the receivers know that she is actually writing on behalf of her colleague Gullubtum, who wants to get word to the two men (Sîn-iddinam and Mar-erṣetim) who are living with or near the recipients. For an unknown reason Gullubtum cannot simply write directly to these two men. The only message sent by Iltani herself to the recipients is at the very end of the letter. There she is moaning over her destitute state but this is a typical theme in the letters of *nadītum*-women and does not necessarily reflect reality. The salutation "May my Lord and Lady keep you well" appears in the letters of the *nadītum* over and over again and refers here to the deities of Sippar: Šamaš and his spouse Aya.

obv. lines 1–2
Speak to (the women) Adi-annitim and Erišti-Aya!

obv. lines 3–9
The following is dictated by (the woman) Iltani. May my Lord and my Lady grant you (both) life. (The men) Sîn-iddinam and Mar-erṣetim are staying with you (two).

rev. lines 1–8, edge line 1
The following is dictated by (the woman) Gullubtum. Your wages which (were given to the man) Namram-šarur, (but) he has not given me one liter of barley. But (you two men) should not be afraid in any way. Write to me about your health so that my heart is calmed!

edge lines 2–5
The following is dictated by Iltani. I am hungry and in my nakedness coldness has clutched me.

Bibliography

Text: K. Veenhof, *Letters in the Louvre* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 14; Leiden: Brill, 2005), no. 23. For cuneiform copy, see François Thureau-Dangin, *Lettres et contrats de l'époque de la première dynastie babylonienne* (Textes cunéiformes 1; Paris: Geuthner, 1910).
Studies and translations: Arthur Ungnad, *Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Ḫammurapi-Dynastie* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1914), no. 129; Rivkah Harris, "Biographical Notes on the Nadītu Women of Sippar," *JCS* 16.1 (1962): 1–12.

6.3.2 Father, Why Am I Hungry?

The *nadītum* had lively correspondence with their fathers and brothers. One of these letters which is especially interesting is translated below. The letter is not perfectly preserved but the meaning is mostly clear. Furthermore, the text is a good example of the Mesopotamian convention of "envelopes." A letter could be covered with a layer of mud on which the message or a summary of it was written again. Often the clay tablet inside as well as the envelope was marked with a seal to protect the integrity of the message and to make sure nobody tampered with it. This particular letter is preserved both as the letter itself and on the envelope. In this case, the text on the envelope seems to be a kind of post scriptum. On the envelope there is a tantalizing reference to a funerary offering (*kispum* in Akkadian) that the *nadītum* in question is making for her grandfather. This suggests

that the *nadītum* were engaged in an ancestral cult which is usually the concern of the main inheritor (often the eldest son) of the deceased.[9] The bone referred to in the text might be a specific type of offering required for this ritual.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to Ili-imguranni! The following is dictated by (the woman) Niši-inišu.

obv. lines 4–7, rev. lines 1–11
May my Lord and my Lady grant you life because of me. Why am I hungry and (why) do you not ask how I am doing? Who in your household goes hungry? Why then am I myself hungry? I keep giving (a specific kind of) wool for interest of silver all the time. Send either silver or wool to me – wool (must be) worth half a shekel.

Translation of the envelope
lines 1–2
To Ili-imguranni, my father.

lines 3–6
Deliver to me the Bone for the funerary offering of your father.

Bibliography

Text: R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem Berliner Museum* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974), no. 5. For cuneiform copy see Otto Schroeder, *Altbabylonische Briefe* (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der königlichen Museen zu Berlin 16; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1917), no. 5.
Translations: Transliteration and translation in German: Paul Kraus, *Altbabylonische Briefe aus der Vorderasiatischen Abteilung der preussischen Staatsmuseen zu Berlin: II Teil* (Mitteilungen Der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft 36/1; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1932), 100–101.
Studies: Rivkah Harris, "The Nadītu Woman," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (ed. R. D. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1964), 122, 132.

9 Roughly from the same era, there are documented cases from Emar and Nuzi, where daughters could, under certain circumstances, take over the duties of sons, including the ancestral cult. See further Brigitte Lion, "Sexe et genre (1). Des filles devenant fils dans les contrats de Nuzi et d'Emar," in *Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* (ed. F. Briquel-Chatonnet, S. Farès, B. Lion, and C. Michel; TOPOI 10; Lyon: Diffusion De Boccard, 2009), 9–25 at 17–18. See also the inscription of Adad-guppi in this volume (7.1.5).

6.3.3 Duššuptu, *nadītum* of Marduk Is Sending Provisions

In a rare letter written by a *nadītum* of Marduk, a woman named Duššuptu uses a phrase parallel to that of the *nadītum*-women of Šamaš: "May my Lord Marduk and my Lady Ṣarpanitum grant you eternal life because of me." In comparison, the *nadītum* of Šamaš in their letters invoke the blessings of the deities they serve, namely Šamaš and Aya. This illustrates continuity between the *nadītum*-women of different cities and gods. As can be seen, this *nadītum* of Marduk, is (like the other *nadītum*) concerned with financial matters in this letter.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the woman) Lamassani! The following is dictated by (the woman) Duššuptu.

obv. lines 3–10
May my Lord Marduk and my Lady Ṣarpanitum grant you eternal life because of me. I am herewith sending you 2 fifths-of-a-kor and 4 seahs of dates, 1 fifth-of-a-kor of emmer, 28 fish, and three great *misi*-fish.

(reverse of the tablet is uninscribed)

Bibliography

Text: F. R. Kraus, *Briefe aus dem British Museum (CT 43 und 44)* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 1; Leiden: Brill, 1964), no. 98. For cuneiform copy, see H. Figulla, *Cuneiform texts from Babylonian tablets in the British Museum: Part 43, Old-Babylonian Letters* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1963), no. 98.
Studies: Rivkah Harris, *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894–1595 B.C.)* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archäologisch Instituut, 1975), 316; Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (Archibab 1; Mémoires de Nabu 14; Paris: SEPOA, 2012), 102.

6.3.4 Letter by Tarâm-Sagila, *nadītum* of Marduk

This letter was probably excavated from Tell ed-Der or Tell Abu Habbah, so from one of the Sippars. However, one cannot say for sure where the woman was writing from. Most probably Tarâm-Sagila is a *nadītum* of Marduk somewhere in northern Babylonia. She is writing to Niš-inišu in Sippar, who was probably a *nadītum* of Šamaš, possibly even the same woman who is writing to her father in the text above. It is possible that

Tarâm-Sagila is a relative of Niš-inišu.[10] Unusually, the benediction of the Lord and Lady is not included in the beginning of the letter. The letter is well preserved, although the concluding remark about the boat is cryptic indeed. It seems possible that the passage is meant to advise Niš-inišu that the barley transactions should not be transported via boats. The text is an interesting example of woman to woman business.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the woman) Niš-inišu! The following is dictated by (the woman) Tarâm-Sagila.

obv. lines 4–10
I did not give any barley to (the woman) Belti-ešešti. Now Belanum, son of Nab-Šamaš has come to you. Receive from him either barley or silver and (after that) I will allocate him barley here.

rev. lines 1–4
You will send a boat and they will seize the boat. And its rent you will (have to) measure out. Illegal seizure is usual.

Bibliography

Text: R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem British Museum (LIH und CT 2–33)* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 2; Leiden: Brill, 1966), no. 148. For cuneiform copy, see L. W. King, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum: Part 29* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1910), plate no 18a.
Transliteration and translation in German: Arthur Ungnad, *Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Hammurapi-Dynastie* (Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 6; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1914), no. 152. See also CAD Ṣ, p. 165 for the final lines.
Studies: Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (Archibab 1; Mémoires de NABU 14; Paris: SEPOA, 2012), 22, 102–103, 207 n1175.

6.3.5 Letter from Zababa about a Debt Slave

This letter serves as an example of the less well-known staff of Zababa, the martial city god of Kish. In the local tradition of this time, his spouse was the goddess Ištar. The letter comes from the Imgur-Eidimanna family archive in

10 See R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem British Museum (LIH und CT 2–33)* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 2; Leiden: Brill, 1966), text no. 150.

Lagaba, which was located near Kutha in southern Mesopotamia. Apparently, quite a few women from this family were consecrated to a deity, presumably to keep up good relations between the god and their family, like the *nadītum* in Sippar did.

This particular letter was sent by a *nadītum* of the god Zababa in Kish to Ša-Amurrum, who might have been a male relative. The letter is written with a tone of an equal addressing an equal. Its subject matter is the compensation to another priestess of Zababa,[11] whose debt slave ran away. The name of the writer is Niš-inišu, but she was a different person from the woman with the same name above. The text can be attributed to the reign of Hammurapi (died c. 1792).

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the man) Ša-Amurrum! The following is dictated by (the woman) Niš-inišu.

obv. lines 4–7
May Ištar and Zababa grant you life! (This letter concerns) the debt slave of the daughter of Tappum, whom you took from her female servant.

obv. line 7
The following is dictated by (the man) Huzalum.

obv. lines 8–9
Because of you (fem.), I have given away (an item worth) 2 shekels of silver for 1 shekel of silver.

obv. line 10
The following is dictated by (the woman) Niš-inišu.

obv. lines 10–12
Satisfy his daughter regarding this matter of a debt slave.

obv. lines 13–14, rev. 1–2
Will they bring back the missing female servant by the command of priestess of Zababa, within 10 league (radius) (= ca. 100 km)?

rev. 3–12
Her house is near my house: will I keep on hearing complaints regarding you? They are given as your substitute. Send the debt slave here (so that) I will not keep on hearing complaints about you. Either send her debt slave or

11 Her title is given as NIN.DINGIR (Sumerian loan word), the Akkadian counterpart of which is in the dialect of Mari probably *ugbabtum*, but elsewhere in Old Babylonian either *nadītum* or *ēntu* (Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 261).

silver to her. In your city you are prominent – why is this matter not already resolved?

Bibliography

Text: R. Frankena, *Briefe aus der Leidener Sammlung (TLB IV)* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 3; Leiden: Brill, 1968), text no. 18. For cuneiform copy see R. Frankena, *Tabulæ cuneiformes a F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl collectæ, Leidæ conservatæ,* vol. 4*: Altbabylonische Briefe* (Leiden: Nederlands instituut voor het nabije oosten, 1965), Tafel 10 (LB 1866).
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Studies: Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (Archibab 1; Mémoires de NABU 14; Paris: SEPOA, 2012), 16, 54, 60.

6.4 Old Babylonian Letters from Mari

This group represents the almost 200 letters relating to women residing in the royal palace at Mari. The texts were written by the queen, princesses, and women of lesser status. The contents of the letters concern the full gamut of royal intrigue including the intimacies of marriage, court politics, and international relations.

The archive excavated from the royal palace of Mari (modern Tell Hariri) is very large: more than 20,000 clay tablets have been found there. By 1996 roughly one-quarter had been published, mostly by French scholars. Chronologically the tablets are very tightly focused, within a couple of decades of each other. Most of them date to the reign of king Zimri-Lim (roughly 1775–1761) and his predecessor Yasmah-Addu. A large part of these texts are letters, describing a variety of topics. Regarding women's letters, the classical source for studying them is ARM 10, which consists of 179 letters to and from women. Some further letters authored by women have been published later in other venues.

King Zimri-Lim was married to Šiptu, the daughter of Yarim-Lim, King of Yamhad (capital in Aleppo). Eventually, the rule of Zimri-Lim was ended by the king of Babylon, Hammurapi, forging the first Babylonian Empire. The role of women during Zimri-Lim's reign is well documented, and it is clear that they were an integral part of the state administration in

Mari. Women organized cultic matters, sent oracles to the king, and ensured that economic activities (for example, textile production) ran smoothly. There are quite a few letter-reports by Mari women translated in chapter 8 that concern divination and oracles. These oracle letter-reports include two letters from the most important wife of king Zimri-lim, Šiptu. Hence, in this chapter we concentrate on other important women.

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Studies: Willem Römer, *Frauenbriefe über Religion, Politik und Privatleben in Mari: Untersuchungen zu G. Dossin, Archives royales de Mari X (Paris 1967)* (AOAT 12; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1971); B. Batto, *Studies on Women at Mari* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Gordon Young (ed.), *Mari in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Mari and Mari Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV: La population féminine des palais d'après les Archives Royales de Mari: Le harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (Mémoires de NABU 5; Paris: SÉPOA, 1999); Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002).
Texts: *Jean-Marie Durand, Archives épistolaires de Mari* (ARM 26; Paris: Éd. Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988); J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002); Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

6.4.1 I Have Only One Maidservant

This letter ties in with the previous section on the *nadītum*-women. Erišti-Aya, one of the daughters of Šiptu and Zimri-Lim, was apparently sent far away from home, all the way to the *gagûm* in Sippar, which is ca. 400 km downstream on the Euphrates from Mari. In a letter to her mother she makes it clear that the decision to make her a *nadītum* was made by the queen and king together. Eight of the letters that she wrote back home have been preserved, one of which has been chosen as an example here.[12]

In these letters she refers to herself as the "praying emblem" who prays constantly for her father's life. The use of the Akkadian word *šurinnum* "divine

12 Letters: ARM 10, text nos. 36–43. These letters have been discussed and translated in Jean-Marie Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 390–402.

emblem" as a designation of an individual is unique in Mesopotamia. It could reflect Erišti-Aya's desire to emphasize her unique position: although the *gagûm* of Sippar was filled with women, **she** was the symbol for her father's household, guaranteeing the good will of Šamaš and Aya.

In this letter, as in many of the others, she seems very unhappy with her life, constantly asking for more servants and goods. Here she is upset that one of her maids has died, and now she has to make do with only one. Clearly this is completely inappropriate for a woman of her status. Time and again she points out that she is holding to her end of the bargain and is constantly praying for the well-being of Zimri-Lim and his dynasty. Thus, she expects to be provisioned according to her status. She did receive some capital from her family when she entered the *gagûm*, but it is not certain how much income she received from that. She addresses her father with a nickname, "my sun."

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to "My Sun!" The following is dictated by Erišti-Aya:

obv. lines 4–6
Because of me, may my Lord and my Lady keep you in good health.

obv. lines 7–14, rev. lines 1–10
When, oh when – I cry out – when will the prosperity of my father's household reach me, and turn my death into life. I have written to you (earlier): "Last year you sent to me two maidservants but one maidservant died." Now then, two maidservants were brought to me but one maidservant died. I am the emblem of your dynasty; why am I not provisioned (properly), not given silver or oil?

rev. lines 11–15
And to the king (*a few words not clear*) I am glad. And I have gifted a garment which is like your clothes but he does not mention my name (positively).

Bibliography

Text: Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), translation into English on p. 264. For transliteration and translation in French, see Georges Dossin, *Correspondance féminine* (Archives royales de Mari 10; Paris: Geuthner, 1978), text no. 39; and for cuneiform copy see CDLI: www.cdli.ucla.edu/P350003 (according to to Georges Dossin, *Archives royales de Mari: 10: la correspondance féminine* [Textes cunéiformes 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967], text no. 39).
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épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 390–402 and text no. 1199.

6.4.2 I Want the Sheep, Brother

Niqhatum is known from three letters addressed to king Zimri-Lim and in all of them she neglects to address the king as "my lord."[13] She could be his biological sister who had attained high rank as a priestess or as a wife to a foreign ruler, or she could simply be a woman of very high rank. The current letter is a straightforward request to the king Zimri-Lim to make good on his earlier promise to send her some sheep.

obv. lines 1–4
Speak to Zimri-Lim! The following is dictated by (the woman) Niqhatum, your sister.

obv. lines 5–10, rev. lines 1–7
I have sent the following request to my brother: "May my brother allocate sheep to me." Then you said the following, indeed this is what you said: "It is winter at the moment, there are no sheep to give. In the spring, I will give (them) to you." This (is what) you wrote to me. Now, now is the spring! There are sheep to give. May my brother give (them) to me!

Bibliography

Text: See Jean-Marie Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), text no. 1252 for French translation and comments. For transliteration and translation in French, see Georges Dossin, *Correspondance féminine* (Archives royales de Mari 10; Paris: Geuthner, 1978), text no. 48 and for cuneiform copy see CDLI: www.cdli.ucla.edu/P350012 (according to Georges Dossin, *Archives royales de Mari: 10: la correspondance féminine* [Textes cunéiformes 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967], text no. 48).

6.4.3 I Want the Throne of Queenship

Two sisters, both daughters of king of Mari, Zimri-lim, were married to the king Haya-sumu of Ilan-ṣura. The exact location of this city is not known, but it was situated in the mountainous areas about 300–400 km north of

13 See Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III*, 479–80.

Mari. Šimatum was married first, and within two years, so was Kirû. Kirû's life in her new home was not happy and she wrote several letters back home. Tensions between the two sisters escalated, as did the tension between the king Haya-sumu and the father of the sisters. Finally, Haya-sumu rebelled against Mari, siding with its enemies. The sisters ended up on different sides: Kirû's dissolution of marriage takes place after about six to seven years of marriage, around 1766 BCE, but Šimatum stays loyal to her husband rather than to her father. The current letter is probably sent in the beginning of their marriage, as Kirû still has high hopes of attaining the position of queen, not just a wife.

obv. lines 1–4
Speak to my star, my father and my lord: the following is dictated by Kirû, your daughter.

obv. lines 5–19
You have already written once and twice about news of my travel to you, but my lord (husband) does not allow me to travel. Today, I myself have sent to you his reply for your information. My lord (husband) Haya-sumu said to me this: "If you and I go together, then whom do we leave (to take care of) the city? Until I myself return from Mari, stay here!" Thus my lord Haya-sumu spoke to me.

obv. lines 20–21, rev. lines 1–10
Now, on the day when Haya-sumu returns here, to the land of Idamaraṣ, my lord (father) should despatch with him one chariot and a litter so that I may come to my father and my lord and make sacrifices to the gods of my father so that I may prosper over there. My travel itinerary is set!

rev. lines 11–19
Another thing; [with this tablet of mine] I am sending (woman) Alla [to] you. May my star, my father and my lord, pay attention very carefully to her report. And this matter you may not tell to anyone! May my father and my lord seat me to the throne of queenship.

edge lines 1–3
Act so that my heart is not sick. To you alone I trust.

Bibliography

Text: Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), translation into English on p. 113; Jean-Marie Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), text no. 1224 (translation in French and partial transliteration) and discussion on pp. 427–445. For transliteration and translation in

French, see Georges Dossin, *Correspondance féminine* (Archives royales de Mari 10; Paris: Geuthner, 1978), texts nos. 34 and 113. For cuneiform copy see CDLI www.cdli.ucla.edu/P349998 (based on Georges Dossin, *Archives royales de Mari: 10: la correspondance féminine* [Textes cunéiformes 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967], texts nos. 34 and 113).
Studies: Nele Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV: La population féminine des palais d'après les Archives Royales de Mari: Le harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (Mémoires de NABU 5; Paris: SÉPOA, 1999), 65; Luciana Urbano, "Marriage Policy in Mari: a Field of Power between Domination and Resistance: Some Reflections from the Perspective of Gender," in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

6.4.4 Kirû Suspects her Husband is a Murderer

This dramatic letter from the same author as the previous letter includes many linguistic oddities that make it probable that the letter was written by Kirû herself, not only dictated by her. This does seem probable since the topic is certainly extremely sensitive and it would perhaps not have been wise to ask a scribe to commit it to writing. The brief note is probably meant to accompany the messenger, Yarim-Dagan, who will report the details of the murder to king Zimri-lim face-to-face. The victims, Dimri-Hammu and the two women, could have been servants of Kirû. The perpetrator is presumably her husband, king Haya-sumu, with whom she had strained relations. This is in accordance with the troubled marital history of Kirû and her husband (see the previous letter).

obv. lines 1–4
Speak to my lord and my father: the following is dictated by Kirû, your daughter.

obv. lines 5–9
Yarim-Dagan should speak (to you about) all these things. May my lord pay attention to his words.

obv. line 10, rev. lines 1–5
Another thing, (I swear it) by my lord and by myself. He killed Dimri-Hammu. (This is what) they say: "A lion has killed him and it has killed two women."

rev. lines 6–9
May my lord listen to this matter and send me a return tablet.

Bibliography

Text: Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), translation into English on p. 114. For transliteration and translation in French, see Georges Dossin, *Correspondance féminine* (Archives royales de Mari 10; Paris: Geuthner, 1978), text no. 35, and for cuneiform copy see CDLI: www.cdli.ucla.edu/P349999 (according to to Georges Dossin. *Archives royales de Mari: 10: la correspondance féminine* [Textes cunéiformes 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967], text no. 35). New French translation and comments in Jean-Marie Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), text no. 1227.

6.5 Other Old Babylonian Letters

The dialect of the letters presented here is Old Babylonian, which is – like Old Assyrian – a dialect of Akkadian. Since the Old Babylonian dialect was used in the southern part of Mesopotamia roughly from 2000 to 1500 BCE, we can conclude that text written in it came from there and from that time period. However, because most of the letters from this period were discovered through clandestine digging and were sold on the antiquities market they lack a clear provenance and their exact place of composition is unknown. In the previous two sections we have discussed first the Old Babylonian letters of the *nadītum*, the priestesses of Babylonian temples, and second the Old Babylonian letters written by elite women, found from the Mari palace archive. The Old Babylonian letters dealt with in this section are in many ways similar to the other Old Babylonian letters. However, they demonstrate that during the Old Babylonian period, there were also women outside these two well-known contexts that could and did write letters. We have chosen here two early letters from the city-state of Ešnunna and three examples of other Old Babylonian letters.

6.5.1 Letter to the King from his Mother-in-Law

This and the following letter were excavated from Tell Asmar, the ancient city of Ešnunna. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, during this time the Mesopotamian political scene was characterized by small city-states competing for dominion. Ešnunna was definitely one of the larger power centers although as far as we know it never established a large kingdom.

The letters found from Tell Asmar are especially significant from a linguistic point of view as they come from a period (ca. 2000–1900 BCE) when very few

Akkadian documents are known. The letters were excavated from a temple/palace complex. All in all about 1,400 texts were found but only 59 of them were letters. Not surprisingly, many of these letters were addressed to the king of Ešnunna, including the letter under discussion here. King Bilalama, who ruled around the turn of the millennium (ca. 2000 BCE), received this letter from his mother-in-law. Bilalama was married to the daughter of an Amorite leader Abda-el, mentioned in the letter. This letter is the earliest known Akkadian letter written by a woman.

The reader should note that terminology relating to slavery in Mesopotamia is not straightforward, as the word *wardum*, slave, can also mean servant depending on the context. For example, in Neo-Assyrian tradition in all letters to the king the senders call themselves slaves – the purpose being to indicate their submission to his authority. Additionally, you will notice that in the letter the terms "mother" and "mother-in-law" are used interchangeably. The mother-in-law, Battum, is upset about the treatment of one of her servants. She points out that her husband is no longer alive and that she is relying now on her son-in-law to do right by her. At the very end of the text she requests her *diqārum* (a rather large bowl of some kind) back. The last remark seems to have been added as an afterthought, in an overflow of emotion. It seems strange that a woman in such a high position would have cared about the fate of one pot. Rather, it seems that this has been added as yet another piece of evidence of how the son-in-law is neglecting to act properly toward her.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the man) Bilalama! The following is dictated by (the woman) Battum.

obv. lines 4–6
I trust in you like (I trusted) Abda-el. To whom else can I turn?

obv. lines 7–20, rev. lines 1–19
If Abda-El were alive, he would give me other slaves. Who is this one that you seized? – (certainly) not your slave! My slaves are not your slaves. The son of Šu-Išhara went to the town of Išur out of his own free will. Mara-El, your slave, sent him to work on textiles.[14] What's more, because of you your slaves (act like) lords and my slaves go wherever (your slaves) wish.[15] If you are indeed my son-in-law and (if) I am your mother, (then) I should be in

14 The exact nature of this word is difficult to determine; see Whiting, *Old Babylonian Letters*, 55.

15 Translation is literally: "Furthermore, because of you **my** slaves (act like) lords and they go wherever they please." However, as argued convincingly by Whiting, it seems more probable that this is what was actually meant. Such mistakes in writing would have been easy to make and if we stick with the literal translation, the sentence seems very illogical and out of place.

your thoughts. Do not make me feel bad. Release my slave! Do not let his harvest be lost and him be hungry! In the matter of this slave, I rely wholly on your sense of fairness.[16]

rev. line 20, edges lines 1–5
If you are my son, the eyes of my enemies . . . Stop my tears!

edges lines 6–10
Furthermore, my large bowl, which I sent there – how long will it stay (there)? – send it back!

Bibliography

Text: Robert Whiting, *Old Babylonian Letters from Tell Asmar* (AS 22; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1987), text no. 12 and plate VI.

6.5.2 Letter About Finances

This letter also originates from Ešnunna, but from a somewhat later period. It comes from the time when Ipiq-Adad I ruled Ešnunna (ca. 1900 BCE), roughly a hundred years after the reign of Bilalama mentioned in the previous letter. The brief note is directed to the writer's brother (either biological or collegial) to instruct him to collect what is owed to her and send it on to her.

lines 1–3
Speak to (the man) Ammu- . . . ! The following is dictated by (the woman) Šelibatum.

lines 4–13
If you are indeed my brother and I am your sister, collect either a debt slave, or silver, or grain from the lady, my colleague, and send it to me.

Bibliography

Text: Robert Whiting, *Old Babylonian Letters from Tell Asmar* (AS 22; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1987), text no. 53. The clay tablet is missing and no cuneiform copy is available. Whiting (p. 109) states that he himself has not actually seen the tablet and that he is using a transliteration that was made by Thorkild Jacobsen.

16 Literal translation: "In the matter of this slave, I come to you with (nothing but) my skin." The meaning in the translation is the suggestion of Whiting and seems valid, although it is not impossible that the idiom would relate to the idea that losing this slave has made her so poor that she has nothing but her skin to cover her.

6.5.3 Letter From The Housekeeper

This letter was probably excavated from Sippar. No dating is possible beyond "Old Babylonian." This letter tablet actually comprises three messages. The first two messages are from the woman Geme-Iškur. She is titled as the *ēmiqtum* of the first recipient. The direct translation of *ēmiqtum* is "female caretaker" but her exact place in an Old Babylonian household is poorly understood. At least in her message to her "employer" she does not take a subservient stance, but asks him to take care of some of her business. The second message is to a man named Kubatum, whom she commands to make himself useful to her employer. The third and final message on the tablet does not seem to be connected to the first two.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the man) Kîn-pî-Marduk! The following is dictated by (the woman) Geme-Iškur, your housekeeper.

obv. lines 4–9
(Regarding) the matter in the city of Babylon (*ca. one word destroyed*) his brother, father (*ca. one word destroyed*). Pay to him the cost of two shekels of silver for my sake and then I myself will satisfy you (regarding) this same cost.

obv. lines 10–11
Speak to (the man) Kubatum! The following is dictated by (the woman) Geme-Iškur.

obv. lines 12–1, rev. line 1
Now, stand by to help Kîn-pî-Marduk! You may not be negligent toward him!

rev. lines 2–3
Speak to (the man) Adad-naṣir! The following is dictated by (the man) Nanna-intuh.

rev. lines 4–8
Did I not send to you the following message (earlier): "Come up to the price of five shekels of silver." You may not be negligent!

Bibliography

Text: R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem Berliner Museum* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974), text no. 7. For cuneiform copy see Otto Schroeder, *Altbabylonische Briefe* (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der königlichen Museen zu Berlin 16; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1917), text no 7.

Previous studies and translations: Otto Schroeder, "Ein mündlich zu bestellender, altbabylonischer Brief," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 21.3 (1918).

6.5.4 A Plea for Mercy to a Brother

This remarkable letter documents the legal convention of debt-slavery, a well-known practice mentioned in the Old Babylonian Laws of Hammurapi (§§117–119). The woman, Ṣuhartum, is writing to her brother, begging for help. It seems she was taken into debt slavery to cover his debts and she is imploring him to give her the funds to release herself from servitude. According to the Laws of Hammurapi, three years of service given by the man's wife or daughter is the maximum amount of time that could be spent in such service. The letter shows that even in debt-slavery, she had enough resources to purchase the services of a scribe (or knew how to write herself) and a messenger. At the end of the letter, there is a curious twist: the woman reports that "your mother" is dead and she wants to take care of "your brothers." This suggests that she was perhaps not the full sister of the recipient. This letter is from Babylon, but no certain date can be ascertained beyond the Old Babylonian period.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to (the man) Ubar-Emah! The following is dictated by (the woman) Ṣuhartum.

obv. lines 4–11, rev. and edges lines 1–14
Ever since you abandoned me and walked away, I have worked for the household of the merchant in lieu of the ten shekels of silver (that is owed to him). Cold and head-lice are devouring me. (It is) debt-slavery. My merchant detains me with him. Because of you I am sold. Furthermore, who should look after your house; your mother has died. If you really are my brother and my lord, send me two shekels of silver so that I may give (it) to my merchant and (so that) your household is not ruined and your brothers will not be lost. Let me look after them.

Bibliography

Text: L. Cagni, *Briefe aus dem Iraq Museum (TIM II)* (Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung 8; Leiden: Brill, 1980), text no. 100. For the cuneiform copy see J. van Dijk, *Old Babylonian Letters and Related Material* (Texts in the Iraq Museum 2; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965), text no. 100.

Studies: For Hammurapi's laws see Martha Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 103.

6.6 A Middle Assyrian Letter

6.6.1 A Letter Concerning Sheep

There are four known Middle Assyrian letters written by women.[17] Middle Assyrian refers both to the historical period ca. 1400–1000 and the Assyrian dialect spoken at that time in northern Mesopotamia. We know very little of Assyria after the end of the Old Assyrian period (see more in 6.2 Old Assyrian letters) but we do know that during the fourteenth century the city of Assur grew into a small kingdom.

Two of the Middle Assyrian letters by women come from the city of Šibaniba, roughly 120 km north of Assur. Here we have translated the one that is fairly well preserved. The city of Šibaniba was an important provincial center already in the Middle Assyrian era and remained so in the Neo-Assyrian empire. The Middle Assyrian material excavated there has been dated to the reigns of kings Adad-nerari I (conventionally dated to 1307–1275) and Shalmaneser I (conventionally dated to 1274–1245). Most of the texts seem to come from an archive of a single important family although the persons mentioned in this letter were apparently not members of that family.

The author of the letter does not see fit to introduce herself by name, nor are any usual polite forms employed. The woman sending the note is concerned about some sheep. The note is probably intended to continue an ongoing discussion, since no background is given regarding the matter and the note is very brief. It seems possible she is sending the note with the messenger mentioned in the letter. This message could have acted as a kind of authorization to deal with the matter of the sheep, whatever that may be. The imperative forms of the letter suggest that the woman is in charge of the matter.

obv. lines 1–3
Speak to Libur-šarri, thus speaks the daughter of Uznani:

17 In addition to the letter translated here, the other three are: (1) Finkelstein, "Cuneiform Texts from Tell Billa," *JCS* 7 (4):111–176, 1953 (see 135, 166 for the text "Billa 61"); (2) Veysel Donbaz, "The Date of the Eponym Nabû-bēla-uṣur," in *Marchands, diplomates et empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mesopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli* (ed. Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès; Paris: ÉRC, 1991), 73–80 (see 78–79 for the text A 2705); (3) Helmut Freydank, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte II* (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler Neue Folge 5; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982), text no. 25. We thank Jaume Llop for providing the list of these three letters. To learn more about these letters we direct the readers to his article "Middle Assyrian Letters: a New Survey," *Aula Orientalis* 30 (2012): 289–306.

obv. lines 4–7, rev. lines 1–3
Concerning the sheep regarding which I issued orders to you: I have sent a man. Report quickly and do not turn the man away.

(rev. lines 3–6 too badly preserved for translation)

Bibliography

Text: Jacob Finkelstein, "Cuneiform Texts from Tell Billa," *JCS* 7.4 (1953): 111–176. On p. 135 a transliteration and translation, on p. 166 copy of cuneiform.
Studies: For a general survey of Middle Assyrian letters, see Jaum Llop, "Middle Assyrian Letters: a New Survey," *Aula Orientalis* 30 (2012): 289–306. For background regarding the archive and the location, see pp. 111–121 of Finkelstein, "Cuneiform Texts from Tell Billa."

6.7 Letters from the Neo-Assyrian Empire

The Neo-Assyrian Empire, the largest superpower that Mesopotamia had seen, flourished from 934 BCE to 612 BCE. For much of that time it reached from the Persian Gulf all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the texts that have been found from this period come from its capital cities. The age-old capital of Assur (modern Qal'at Sherqat) remained an important city throughout Neo-Assyrian history, but king Assurnaṣirpal II (883–859) moved the administrative capital to Kalhu (modern Nimrud). After the death of Sargon II in 705, a new capital was established at Nineveh (surrounded by the modern city of Mosul). Nineveh remained the capital of the Empire until its destruction in 612.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was not only one of the largest empires of the ancient Near East, it is also one of the best documented.[18] Even more importantly, a huge majority of the Neo-Assyrian texts have been edited in recent decades. There are a large number of letters as well, most of them published in the *State Archives of Assyria* series. So far this series has published 2,740 letters in nine volumes (SAA 1, 5, 10, 13, 15–19). It is surprising that of all the published letters we know of only seven that were written by women. Compared with the Mari archives or the letters found from Old Assyrian

18 For an excellent overview of Neo-Assyrian sources, see Raija Mattila and Jouni Harjumäki, "Change or Chance? Studying Change in Neo-Assyrian Administration," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 21 (2015): 11–20.

Kanesh, this is a ridiculously small number. Out of those seven letters, four are preserved well enough to be included here.[19]

Bibliography

For Neo-Assyrian texts, see the following publication series: State Archives of Assyria, Cuneiform texts from Nimrud, and The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods / The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period. For Assyrian kingdoms in general, a good starting point is Karen Radner, *Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For studies on Neo-Assyrian women, see the following three monographs: Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999); Sherry Lou Macgregor, *Beyond Hearth and Home: Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society* (SAAS 21; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012); Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015).

6.7.1 Letter from the Daughter of a King to her Sister-in-Law

The most often cited of the known Neo-Assyrian letters authored by women is this remarkable letter from the sister of the crown prince to the wife of the crown prince. Šeru'a-eṭirat, the daughter of the reigning king Esarhaddon (680–669), writes to Libbali-šarrat, the wife of the crown prince Assurbanipal (reigning king 668–630). Šeru'a-eṭirat encourages her to do her "homework" and to "write her tablet." In the letter she aims to define their relative status in the most precise manner possible. She titles herself as "Šeru'a-eṭirat, the eldest daughter of the Succession Palace of Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni, the great king, mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria." The recipient (Libbali-šarrat) is "daughter-in-law – the Lady of the House of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria." Clearly, Šeru'a-eṭirat has a higher place in court hierarchy. This could also be reflected in the opening formula: "This is the word of the king's daughter . . ." Usually only the king began his letters by stating that "This is the word of the king . . . " By reminding her brother's wife of her high status Šeru'a-eṭirat is trying to encourage Libbali-šarrat to apply herself to her studies for her own benefit as well as that of the royal house. This letter

19 In addition to the letters discussed here there are two very fragmentary letters, KAV 170 and SAA 16 153, and one where there is every reason to assume that the writer was a mother writing to her son, but since the beginning of the letter is not preserved, we have not included it here (SAA 18 117).

is especially important, as it strongly suggests that some royal women learned how to read and write. Furthermore, this letter seems to imply that shame would be brought to the family if a royal woman was unable to read. The name appearing in the letter "Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni" is a more formal "court" name of King Esarhaddon.

obv. lines 1–2
Word of the king's daughter to Libbali-šarrat.

obv. lines 3–6, rev. lines 1–7
Why do you not write on your clay tablet? (Why) do you not rehearse your exercise tablet? Otherwise, they will say: "Is this the sister of Šeru'a-eṭirat, the eldest daughter of the Succession Palace of Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni, the great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria?" And you are the daughter, the daughter-in-law – the Lady of the House of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince of the Succession Palace of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

Bibliography

Text: Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 16; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), text no. 28. Also available at: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saa16/P334196. For a photo, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P334196; for a cuneiform copy, R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum*, vols. 1–14 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914), text no. 308.
Studies: Alasdair Livingstone, "Ashurbanipal: literate or not?," *ZA* 97.1 (2007): 103–105; Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 88–89.

6.7.2 Letter to the Palace Scribe Regarding Servants

This letter originates from the reign of Esarhaddon as well. A female subordinate of the palace scribe, Saraia, writes to him about seven servants of the governor of Bet-Naialu (exact location unknown) who are to be handed over to Marduk-eriba. The relationships between the persons mentioned in the text are far from straight-forward. If these seven persons were servants of the palace scribe, how could the governor give them to Marduk-eriba? Although it is possible, based on some other evidence, that Marduk-eriba was the deputy of the palace scribe at this time, it does not solve all the problems. If these people were his servants, why are they not allowed to enter his household? They are apparently important enough to appeal to Saraia, but not important enough to

communicate directly with the palace scribe. Clearly these seven servants thought that Saraia could influence the palace scribe. Her exact relationship to the palace scribe is not specified, other than that she addresses him as her lord. This does not necessarily mean that her rank was low, as the address defines only the relationship between her and him. After the address, there follows a typically Neo-Assyrian blessing section wishing the blessings of the gods upon the letter's recipient.

obv. lines 1–2
To the palace scribe, my lord, your female servant Saraia.

obv. lines 3–7
May Bel, Beltia, Lady of Babylon, Nabû, Tašmetum, Ištar of Nineve (and) Ištar or Arbail bless my lord. May they give to my lord long life, happiness of the mind and happiness of the body.

obv. lines 8–9, rev. lines 1–7
(Regarding) the servants of my lord which the governor of Bet-Naialu took away – they are seven souls (altogether) – and gave to Marduk-eriba. Now these people are here. They have come before me and said to me as follows: "Speak in front of the palace scribe (the following): 'Now, he does not allow us to enter the House of Marduk-eriba.'"

rev. lines 8–9
The eunuch whom my lord "sealed" is with them at the moment.

Bibliography

Text: Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 16; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), text no. 49. Also available at: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saa16/P334161. For a photo, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P334161; for a cuneiform copy: R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum*, vols. 1–14 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914), text no. 220.
Studies: Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 163–164.

6.7.3 Letter to Brother: I Will Forgive You Your Deficient Character

This letter from sister to brother was found from Kalhu, from the North-West Palace. This might indicate that the brother who is addressed was a

court official. In any case, the woman sending the letter, Datâ, must have been a woman of very high rank to be able to send a letter to this person. Since the letter is written in Babylonian dialect and in Babylonian script, it seems probable that Datâ lived somewhere in Babylonia, which at this time meant the southern part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This suggestion is supported by the fact that she specifically refers to Ištar of Babylon, a local deity. Based on archival context, the text can be dated either to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) or Sargon II (721–705). The names of Datâ and Gagâ are not Babylonian or Assyrian, unlike the names of the two men mentioned in the letter. The letter is unorthodox in composition, contents, and language and it does not seem impossible that it was written by Datâ herself.

obv. lines 1–2
Clay tablet of (the woman) Datâ to her brother Šumu-iddina.

obv. lines 3–8
May Mullissu and Ištar of Babylon pronounce well-being to my brother's land. Each day I pray to Mullissu and Ištar of Babylon for the life and breath of my brother.

obv. lines 8–13
Why have I not seen your messenger before today? Now, if you are alive, I wish to forgive you your deficient character and dance.

obv. lines 13–17, rev. lines 1–3
(Woman) Gagâ is dead and your brother is disturbed (by it). Come here and meet with him! I have sent to you (this message) in desperate need. Come quickly!

rev. lines 3–9
May Mullissu and Ištar of Babylon know that every day I am concerned (about him). Do not trust in the fire in your heart. Oh god!

rev. lines 10–12
Šulluma asks about the health of his brother Šumu-iddina.

Bibliography

Text: Mikko Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud* (SAA 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012), text no. 144. Also available at: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saa19/P224382. For cuneiform copy, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P224382 (according to Henry Saggs, *The Nimrud Letters* [Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 5; London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2001], plate 47, number ND 2052).

6.7.4 News from Bit-Dakkuri to the King

The final Neo-Assyrian letter is a remarkable missive sent to the king himself by a woman named Barsipitu (lit. "The Borsippean woman"). Hers is the only letter preserved from the whole Neo-Assyrian epistolary corpus, numbering in the thousands, in which a woman writes directly to the king.[20] She reports to the king that she and her party have arrived safely in Bit-Dakkuri and that Ana-Nabû-taklak as well as all the people of Bit-Dakkuri are rejoicing and praising the king for his decision to return the son of their lord to them. Ana-Nabû-taklak was probably a royal official residing in Babylonia.

The details of the historical situation in the Bit-Dakkuri area during this time are not exactly clear, but based on what is known, the following seems plausible. Balassu, the leader of the Bit-Dakkuri tribe, was forced to flee to Assyria with his family before 721. After Sargon II (721–705) reconquered this southern part of Mesopotamia in 710 BCE, he reinstated the son of Balassu in Bit-Dakkuri in some official capacity. Based on some circumstantial evidence, it seems plausible that Barsipitu is the widow of Balassu and the mother of the said son. She is returning him to Bit-Dakkuri, acting as an envoy of king Sargon, reporting directly to the king on the success of the mission. This scenario would also fit with the known Assyrian policy of raising young high-born foreigners in the Assyrian royal court before placing them in positions of power, thus ensuring (hopefully) complete loyalty to the Assyrian royal house.

It is not unimportant that this remarkable woman was a member of the Bit-Dakkuri clan. Bit-Dakkuri refers to an area, but the exact translation is "household of Dakkuri." Thus, rather than referring to an exact city, or city-state, it refers to a Chaldean tribe that inhabited a stretch of land in southern Mesopotamia. Unlike in the neighboring "proper" kingdoms on the margins of the Assyrian Empire, there are other known cases of tribal leaders being female as well as male.

obv. lines 1–2
To the king, my lord, (from) your female servant Barsipitu.

obv. line 3
I hope that the king, [my lord], is doing well.

obv. lines 4–18, rev. lines 1–4
Under the protection of the gods of the [king, our lord] we entered Bit-Dakkuri in good health. Ana-Nabû-taklak and all the people of the land of Dakkuri have become confident in our presence. They keep blessing everything about the king, our lord, saying: "Now we know that the king, our

20 Although a fragment of a letter is preserved where the Assyrian king is approached by "the Borsippan gentlewomen" (see Luukko and Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, text no. 153, sender partially reconstructed).

lord, has reestablished Bit-Dakkuri and put it to the lead, as he has sent us the son of our lord. Furthermore, we will indeed live under the protection of the king, our lord, forever."

Bibliography

Text: Manfried Dietrich, *The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib* (SAA 17; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003), text no. 73. Also available at: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/saa17/P237836. For a photo, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P237836; for a cuneiform copy: R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum*, vols. 1–14 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914), text no. 886.
Study: Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 139–140.

6.8 Letters from the Neo-Babylonian Empire

Even before the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (612 BCE) a successful rebellion ended Assyrian control of southern parts of Mesopotamia, in other words Babylonia. General Nabopolassar secured the Babylonian throne by 626 and in 616 he launched an attack against Assyria. Medes joined in and Nineveh, the capital city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, was conquered and sacked in 612. After the demise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, roughly the same area remained under central control, but the centre of power shifted from north to south, to the city of Babylon.

There is a wealth of evidence from the Neo-Babylonian era (612–539). The majority of Neo-Babylonian archives have been recovered either from the temple of Šamaš in Sippar or from Ištar's temple in Uruk. Many texts come from private archives of the Babylonian elite. Neo-Babylonian archives often extend into the period following the demise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the Achaemenid period (with the language form changing from Neo- to Late Babylonian). These archives thus attest to continuity in the area and show that the cuneiform culture and Akkadian language did not die out after this last great Mesopotamian Empire was conquered by Cyrus the Great. The total number of letters from this time period is roughly 1,750, almost all of which are by now published, at least in cuneiform copies. Of these letters, there are fourteen which to our knowledge were written by women.[21] Of these, three of the better preserved letters have been chosen here as examples.

21 Eckart Frahm and Michael Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Letters and Contracts from the Eanna Archive* (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 21; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011),

Bibliography

See introductions in: Eckart Frahm and Michael Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Letters and Contracts from the Eanna Archive* (Yale Oriental Series: Babylonian Texts 21; Yale: Yale University Press 2011); Johannes Hackl, Michael Jursa, and Martina Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (Spätbabylonische Briefe 1; AOAT 414/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014). See also Michael Jursa, "Neubabylonische Briefe" in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments: Neue Folge Band 3, Briefe* (ed. B. Jankowski and G. Wilhelm; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 158–172.

6.8.1 Letter to a Son

In this letter, possibly originating from the city of Uruk, a woman is writing to her son – either her biological son or someone who is dependent on her. Here we see an interesting trend in the letters of women regarding the deities invoked in the blessings section. If the woman is writing to a man of equal or lower status, she refers to female deities in the blessings section of the letter. But if she is writing to a man higher in the hierarchy, male deities can be mentioned. The same can be observed in letters by men to women. Only if they were writing to a woman who was higher in hierarchy might they introduce female deities in the blessings section. This is not a cast-iron rule, but there is a clear tendency to this in the Neo-Babylonian letters.

The woman, Balassu, wants her son to send her a female slave. At the end of the letter she is also asking how her daughter (possibly her daughter-in-law) Ṣiraia is doing.

obv. lines 1–3
Tablet of (the woman) Mušezibtu, to Balassu, her son.

obv. lines 3–6
May Lady of Uruk and Nanaia proclaim well-being for my son.

obv. lines 7–11
You would like me to be dependent of your protection. Whom would I reward instead of you?!

168; *Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale, 1917), 28 (for transliteration and translation see Denise Cocquerillat, *Palmeraies et cultures de l'Éanna d'Uruk (559–520)* [Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka 8; Berlin: Mann, 1968], 61, 122 and Erich Ebeling, *Neubabylonische Briefe aus Uruk* [Beiträge zur Keilschriftforschung und Religionseschichte des Vorderen Orients 1–4; Berlin: Ebeling, 1930–1934], 182–183); and twelve letters in Hackl, Jursa, and Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (nos. 88, 99, 130, 131, 155, 178, 179, 213, 216, 222, 240, 241). We would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to Heather Baker for drawing our attention to some of these letters.

rev. lines 1–11, edge line 1
(The woman) Nanaia-hussinni is living over there (in the service of) the female employer of my slave woman. Is she not yours (to command)? Have you not said to me thus: "In these travelings of mine I will send her to you"? Now, why did you not send her in the hands of some other traveller?

edge lines 2–3
(The woman) Mušezibtu inquires after the health of Ṣiraia, her daughter.

Bibliography

Text: Johannes Hackl, Michael Jursa, and Martina Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (Spätbabylonische Briefe 1; AOAT 414/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), text no. 99, discussion on pp. 53–55, 211–212. For cuneiform copy, see *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum: Part 22* (London: British Museum, 1906), text no. 224.

6.8.2 Cut up the Meat

In this brief letter from Borsippa, the woman named Amtia is giving instructions about how to deal with an amount of meat.

obv. lines 1–2
Tablet of (woman) Amtia to (man) Bel-eṭer.

obv. lines 3–11, rev. lines 1–3
Now, if it is possible for you, cut up the meat that you have there, and put it in salt. However, if this is not possible for you, give the meat on the ninth day to Naṣir so that he may cut the meat.

rev. lines 4–6
See, I am writing to you via Itti-Nabû-guzu.

Bibliography

Text: Johannes Hackl, Michael Jursa, and Martina Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (Spätbabylonische Briefe 1; AOAT 414/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), text no. 155, discussion on pp. 270–271. For cuneiform copy, see *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum: Part 22* (London: British Museum, 1906), text no. 221.

6.8.3 My Dates Have Been Stolen!

This letter from a private archive in Sippar relates to an argument over dates. The woman writing the letter, Gagaya, is recounting the problems

she has had getting payment for her dates. Probably the same woman is known from a document datable to 611 BCE. In the letter she is asking "her father" to intervene on her behalf in the matter. On lines 10–11 she refers to Šamaš, god of the sun and justice: "Raise up your head and look at Šamaš!" This phrase is most probably meant to remind her father that the sun god sees all injustices in the land and that he should do right by her and her daughters. The letter most probably originates from the reign of king Nabopolassar (626–604). "The Dakkurean" mentioned in the letter is probably a representative of the clan of Bit-Dakkuri in southern Mesopotamia.

obv. lines 1–2
Tablet of (woman) Gagaya to Ša-pî-Bel her father.

obv. lines 2–5
I hope my father is doing well. May Bel and Nabû proclaim well-being to my father.

obv. lines 6–11
Why do I and my daughters have to die of thirst, waiting to hear from you? Raise up your head and look at Šamaš!

obv. lines 11–17, rev. lines 1–15 and edges
Why has Bel-uballiṭ – in your presence – carried off all my dates? When I spoke with Bel-upahhir he told me that: "See! Your dates are with Bel-uballiṭ." However, Bel-uballiṭ has not paid for all the dates. When I said to them: "Give me the dates!" they replied, "Go and speak to the Dakkurean!" The second time when I spoke to them, (they said) "Go and shout out to the gods!"

left edge
I am now waiting for my lord. May I hear what is my lord's reply.

Bibliography

Text: Johannes Hackl, Michael Jursa, and Martina Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (Spätbabylonische Briefe 1; AOAT 414/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), text no. 213, discussion on pp. 54–55. See also Michael Jursa, "Neubabylonische Briefe," in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments: Neue Folge Band 3, Briefe* (ed. B. Jankowski and G. Wilhelm; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 158–172, esp. 161. For cuneiform copy, see *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum: Part 22* (London: British Museum, 1906), text no. 222.

6.8.4 Settle the Matter About a Field

This letter cannot be dated exactly but it originates from Neo-Babylonian Uruk. It attests to circumstances that require participation and written

statements from different parties, all of them presumably involved in this matter of a field, possibly a sale.

obv. lines 1–5
Tablet of (woman) Belet-ekalli-eṭerat to Babûnu, her daughter. May (the goddess) Belet-ekallim proclaim your well-being.

obv. lines 6–10
As you see, Iddiya, son of Ki-Bel and Muranu, the scribe, (are) before you. Complete the matter with him regarding this field which (lies) by the city.

obv. lines 11–13, rev. lines 1–8
He (=Iddiya) has brought (the scribe?) for my sake and for your sake. Attend to the witnessing [in Uruk]. I myself am attending to the witnessing in Babylon. Iddiya should not return empty-handed.

Bibliography

Text: Johannes Hackl, Michael Jursa, and Martina Schmidl, *Spätbabylonische Privatbriefe* (Spätbabylonische Briefe 1; AOAT 414/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), text no. 240; cuneiform copy is on p. 514.

CHAPTER 7

Inscriptions

Inscriptions are distinguished from other kinds of writing by the support material on which they were written. Unlike letters, scholarly documents, prophecies, or hymns, the term inscription refers to a text that was cut into a durable surface – for example, bronze, stone, or fired clay – as opposed to unbaked tablets.[1] Inscriptions were often addressed to the gods or posterity. Messages were written into monuments so that the gods might remember a person's accomplishments and/or to remind future generations of a leader's deeds. Inscriptions were probably composed by professional scribes even when they appear to be written in the first person and in the case of monumental inscriptions it is probably the case that they were inscribed by artisans who may have been illiterate and merely copied the shapes given to them by a scribe.[2] In this anthology we have chosen to include some such inscriptions since our definition of authorship includes texts which tell us something about the way ancient scribes thought women should or could have written (see chapter 3). Inscriptions are examples of individual agency and in most cases include the name of the person who commissioned them (as is the case with the Enheduanna disk). On the other hand, inscriptions can also be viewed as links in a continuing literary tradition and in that sense display instrumental agency.

Inscriptions attributed to elite women are wide-reaching both chronologically and geographically. Inscriptions appear on a wide variety of objects. Most inscriptions were commissioned by royal or wealthy persons in order to dedicate buildings by inscribing a brick or door socket.[3] Stone monuments were also inscribed and sometimes included accompanying illustrations. The inscriptions could be short – sometimes only a few signs making up a name – or very long. The most famous Mesopotamian inscription, the Laws of Hammurapi, contains a lengthy prologue, over 280 laws, and an epilogue. In this case, the inscription filled almost the entire space of the seven-and-a-half-foot-tall monument. Oftentimes inscriptions, at least

1 Rocío Da Riva, *The Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions: An Introduction* (GMTR 4; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 25.

2 Brigitte Lion, "Literacy and Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92–96.

3 Jerrold S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions,* vol. 1: *Presargonic Inscriptions* (New Haven: The American Oriental Society, 1986), 4–5.

those intended for public display, were written in a more formal script than was used for writing in clay.

There are dozens of Mesopotamian dedicatory inscriptions which were commissioned by women in Presargonic Nippur, royal women of the Ur III Empire, princesses of the Lagaš dynasty, and elite women of Old Babylonian Nippur. Many of these inscriptions are inscribed on votive objects such as statues and bowls. Additionally, women of Isin and Larsa commissioned foundation inscriptions which document their building and repair efforts. These inscriptions are of particular interest since they document activities that were usually the province of kings. We have chosen Enanedu's inscription to represent them.

After the Old Babylonian period there is a long gap of time in which there are no extant inscriptions attributed to females. Inscriptions by royal women appear again in the Neo-Assyrian period. These include Queen Naqi'a's building inscription, Sammu-ramat's war stele, inscriptions on votive objects, various non-votive objects that were inscribed with the queen's name, the Assur stele yard inscriptions, and two tomb inscriptions.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first one we have titled "monumental" inscriptions, for the lack of a better word, as the inscriptions included there were meant for display, with the exception of the two funerary inscriptions. However, they too were written to reflect a certain belief system, to record things of cultural value forever in stone. The second part deals with votive inscriptions, which were often inscribed on a variety of objects dedicated to deities.

Bibliography

For a nice overview on women's inscriptions in Mesopotamia, see Géraldine Gadaut, "Les femmes dans les inscriptions royales de Mésopotamie, IIIe–Ier millénaires av. J.-C.," in *Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* (ed. F. Briquel-Chatonnet, S. Farès, B. Lion, and C. Michel; TOPOI 10; Lyon: Diffusion De Boccard, 2009), 233–251. See also Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Women of Religion in Mesopotamia: The High Priestess in the Temple," *Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 1 (2006): 31–44, especially 34.

7.1 Monumental Inscriptions

7.1.1 Disk of Enheduanna

This disk (ca. 2300 BCE), along with an Old Babylonian copy of it (ca. 2000–1600 BCE), was found in the early twentieth century when a team of excavators discovered the temple at Ur. They unearthed a round plaque that

has a relief carved on the front which depicts the consecration of an altar that Enheduanna had commissioned. The relief is composed of four figures, one of which is the priestess Enheduanna. In front of her a male assistant pours a libation onto the altar while two other assistants watch from behind. The Ur ziggurat sits on the left periphery. On the back of the disk is an inscription. It is unlikely that Enheduanna herself carved the words but perhaps the artisan worked from a text that she provided.[4]

> Enheduanna – *zirru*-priestess[5], spouse of Nanna, daughter of Sargon, king of the world, in the temple of Inanna-ZA.ZA in Ur – made a shrine and named it "Dais, An's Table."

Bibliography

Text and translation: Douglas R. Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)* (RIME 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).
Study: Irene J. Winter, "Women in Public: The Disk of Enheduanna, the Beginning of the Office of En-Priestess, and the Weight of the Visual Evidence," in *La femme dans le proche-orient antique* (ed. Jean-Marie Durand; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987), 189–201.

7.1.2 Cone of Enanedu

A few centuries after Enheduanna another en priestess of the temple at Ur, Enanedu, wrote or commissioned a piece of writing. It is written in the first person with Enanedu as the speaker but there is no conclusive way to tell if Enanedu wrote this as she claimed or whether it was written by another scribe. However, as we have seen, there is evidence that some royal women and priestesses were literate so it is entirely possible that Enanedu did in fact write this herself.

This inscription commemorates the renovation of the *gipar* – the priestess's residence – which Enanedu oversaw. She composed a narrative about her accomplishment on a cone which she placed within the walls of the *gipar*. The cone functioned as a time capsule of sorts. It was there for future renovators to discover and learn of her legacy. The cone was discovered in antiquity when the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus had the *gipar* rebuilt in the sixth century.

The inscription is not dated but there is an oblique reference to a victory over the city of Isin which may correspond with sometime in or shortly after

4 The image of Enheduanna on the disk inspired the cover of this volume.
5 There are three known *zirru*-priestess: Enheduanna, Enanatuma, and Enanedu. Each of these women were en priestesses at Ur but it is unclear what the term *zirru* specifies: Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "In the Service of the Gods: The Ministering Clergy," in *The Sumerian World* (ed. Harriet Crawford; New York: Routledge, 2013), 246–274.

the thirtieth year of the reign of Rim-Sin I, king of Larsa, which would correspond to 1793 BCE.[6] Kudur-mabuk, who is mentioned in the prologue, was the father of Rim-Sin and the founder of a dynasty of Larsa kings. Like Enheduanna, Enanedu was a princess. Also like Enheduanna, Enanedu is a name that she was given when she took her position at the temple. Her birth name is unknown.

1–9
I, Enanedu, am the en priestess of Nanna, the pure heart of the exalted office of the en priestess and heavenly royalty, beloved of Ningal, who openly founded with her own hand the lustrous office of the en priestess, the image of Ekišnugal, the glory of the cosmos, the adornment of the divine bedroom, the light shining from the Land, pure and apt to the royal crown of the en office, properly selected for the divine cleansing rites, the pious princess who presides over cleansing rites at the palace's grand basin.

10–14
I, Enanedu, am the en priestess, the cleric of Nanna and Ningal on behalf of Ur, foremost city of Sumer, where the musical instrument is played for Ašimbabbar,[7] (I am) the person who rebuilt the *gipar* for the en priestess in a ritually clean place, its grandeur suitable for the en priestess.

15–25
One day Nanna and Ningal looked at me with bright faces, they gave me life and a joyful face, they made my name magnificent in the shrine of Ekišnugal[8] – the dwelling place of their divinity – in my ritually clean mouth they placed life-giving prayers, taking my outstretched hands they extended the life of Rim-Sin, my twin brother, and gave into his hands the lands of all his enemies.

26–33
On that day the shining *gipar* – the dwelling place of my en office – its bricks dislocated from the foundation, I, Enanedu, the en priestess, rightly called by a majestic name, daughter of Kudur-mabuk, set down (new) bricks aligned with the old foundation of the shining *gipar*. I plastered its walls smooth. I gave that house new lines.

34–43
On that day, the residence that brought weeping, the place where many former en priestesses had died, was not ringed with a wall, its entrance . . . collapsed, there were no guards, and the place was not ritually clean. I, in my great understanding, made a memorial ground for the deceased. I made a

6 Madeleine André Fitzgerald, *The Rulers of Larsa* (PhD diss., Yale, 2002), 163.
7 Ašimbabbar is another name for the god Nanna.
8 Ekišnugal is the name of the temple dedicated to the sun god Nanna at Ur.

large sacred area that was larger than the graveyard of the former en priestesses. I ringed that dilapidated place with a great wall, set a formidable guard, and cleansed that place.

44–48
To preserve my name, given at (the assumption of) the en office, I accomplished this work. I inscribed my foundation inscription with the fame of my en-office and deposited it for posterity. I named the wall: "Praise be to the one who honors me."

Bibliography

Text, translation, and study: Douglas R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)* (RIME 4; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 299–301.

7.1.3 The Grave Inscription of Queen Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua

Queen Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua is the earliest Neo-Assyrian queen known by name. Her full title, queen of Assurnaṣirpal, king of Assyria, of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, daughter of Aššur-nirka-da''in, great cupbearer of Assurnaṣirpal, king of Assyria, is best explained by assuming that she remained the head of the queen's household after the death of Assurnaṣirpal II (883–859), during the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824), who might have been her son. Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua is the only Neo-Assyrian queen whose father is included in her title. It seems probable that her father had such an important position that it was worth including in her title alongside the kings.

Her two grave inscriptions are the only texts that have preserved her name. However, based on the dating of the text Edubba 10 1 (844), it seems that the treasurer of the queen mentioned in the text was her treasurer (although her name is not mentioned). Edubba 10 1 was even found from an archive located in the room above her tomb.[9]

Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua's grave was built under the floors of the grand northwest palace in Kalhu (modern Nimrud) built by her husband Assurnaṣirpal II, in the area that probably housed high-ranking women of the court. This is not the only burial under the floors of this palace; in fact, the numerous burials of queens suggest that the palace remained the home of

9 For the text and the archival context, see A. Y. Ahmad and John Nicholas Postgate, *Archives from the Domestic Wing of the North-West Palace at Kalhu/Nimrud* (Edubba 10; London: Nabu Publications, 2007).

the queen long after the time of Assurnaṣirpal II. At some point, probably after the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727), the Neo-Assyrian kings moved away from the northwest palace, which makes it puzzling that the Neo-Assyrian queens still continued to be buried there. It is possible that the northwest palace remained the residence of the queen regardless of the king's whereabouts; or else it served as the traditional burial place of the queens even after they ceased to reside there. We would lean toward the latter possibility, especially since the remains of Atalia, queen of Sargon II (721–705), were heated to 150–250 degrees Celsius after death. This might have been done to preserve the body and transport her remains for a proper burial in the northwest palace. Since the kings were buried at Assur, regardless of the new palaces and capitals they built, the same could be true for the burial of queens.

There are two versions of this text. The first one was found inscribed on the stone lid of a sarcophagus buried in the main chamber of the tomb. The main chamber was apparently looted in antiquity and the sarcophagus itself was empty. However, based on finds from the grave antechamber, the tomb received other, later burials, possible of later queens as well.[10] The second, longer inscription was inscribed on a marble tablet found from the tomb as well. The inscription on the tablet duplicates the text found on the sarcophagus' lid, but includes an additional eight lines at the end. Hence, the translation is here offered only of this longer inscription. The stone tablet in question is not perfectly preserved, which means that in places the text has been reconstructed based on the lid inscription. This has not been indicated in the translation. As usual, text in parenthesis indicates additions by us.

This inscription has an interesting feature of having the edges inscribed as well. On the lower edge there is inscribed a very brief remark (consisting of three cuneiform signs): "He turns over." On the upper edge it states (with two cuneiform signs) "He seizes it." These two remarks are not included in the lid inscription and there is no convincing explanation for their presence. In any case, they were not part of the composition, so we have not included them in the translation of the text.

Structurally, the funerary inscription is divided into five sections: (1) introduction of the author as the Assyrian queen; (2) curse section to the potential defiler of the grave; (3) another introduction of the queen as the daughter of an important man; (4) another curse section; and (5) the final sentence addressing the cult of the dead which the queen expected to benefit from. The first curse section mentions Šamaš, god of the sun, and Ereškigala, goddess of the underworld, who are rarely paired like this. It is possible that the implication is that the potential defiler will be cursed in worlds where both humans and their

10 Among the grave goods was a golden seal of Hamâ, queen of Shalmaneser IV (784–773), and it seems possible that she was among the people buried there.

spirits dwell: under the sun and under the earth. This feature can also be seen in another funerary inscription of an Assyrian queen, queen Iabâ, who lived about a hundred years after Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua. Funerary inscriptions such as the text translated here are rare in Mesopotamia. Therefore it is remarkable that such inscriptions are attributed to two Neo-Assyrian queens. In addition to Šamaš and Ereškigala there are other similarities between the two inscriptions as well (see further the introduction to Iabâ's inscription below, 7.1.4). A further text that relates to these two inscriptions is the inscription of Adad-guppi, also translated below (7.1.5). It is considerably more complex, as well as coming from a slightly different cultural background. Nonetheless, it too was composed after the death of Adad-guppi and it is written mostly in first person singular. The inscription here is mostly written in third person, but "my throne" is clearly preserved. It seems rather clear that the text is something that the scribe(s) composing the text expected her to say.

obv. lines 1–3
Belonging to Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, queen of Assurnaṣirpal, king of Assyria, (and) of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria.

obv. lines 4–11, rev. line 1
In the future, no one – not a court woman or a queen – should be placed inside (my coffin). This stone coffin should not be removed from its place. Whoever removes this stone coffin from its place, his spirit shall not receive funerary offerings with (other) spirits. (To do such a thing) is an anathema to Šamaš and Ereškigala.

rev. lines 2–4
Daughter of Aššur-nirka-da''in, great cupbearer of Assurnaṣirpal, king of Assyria.

rev. lines 5–9
Whoever in the future removes my throne from before the spirits, may his spirit not receive [a bread? (offering)].

rev. lines 10–12
May someone in the future cover (me) with a cloth, may he anoint (me) with oil (and) may he offer a ram sacrifice.

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7.1.4 The Grave Inscription of Queen Iabâ

This Standard Babylonian text is inscribed on an alabaster tablet which is currently in the Iraq Museum. It was found in the antechamber of a grave under the floor of Room 49 in the northwest palace of the ancient city of Kalhu. The tablet was buried with the queen Iabâ, who was the Neo-Assyrian queen from ca. 744 to ca. 722 BCE, during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V. She was probably known by another name as well, Banitu, which is the Akkadian translation of the West Semitic name Iabâ, "Beautiful."

The text starts with a statement introducing Iabâ and recounting her death in the third person singular, but the narrative changes soon to a first-person account. The deceased queen enumerates the possible hostile parties who might attempt to disturb her eternal rest and invokes a terrible curse upon the potential villains. As the tablet was found in the antechamber, it seems possible that the aim of the tablet was to ward off intruders. The curse did not scare the next generation, though: it seems that the queen of the next king, Queen Atalia, was buried on top of Iabâ in her own sarcophagus. The deities mentioned in the text are mostly gods of the underworld.

This inscription can be described as a literary text, since it was written on a stone tablet and addressed to the gods and posterity. As for the authorship of the text: since Queen Iabâ did not write this herself, the text reflects the scribe's view of what the queen might have written. Clearly the dead queen was imagined as being vengeful if her royal prerogatives were attacked, even after her death. There does not seem to

be anything very gender-specific about this, as similar funerary curses by Mesopotamian kings are known as well. In the Neo-Assyrian context, the text reflects a continuous Neo-Assyrian literary tradition, since a similar inscription is known from a hundred years earlier, from the tomb of another Neo-Assyrian queen, Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua (see 7.1.3). There are clear similarities between the two texts. In fact, this inscription seems a more elaborate version of the earlier one. There is the same mix of third- and first-person narrative and the same themes: the introduction of the owner of the grave, evoking of deities (Šamaš and gods of the underworld), and the horrible curse pronounced on the defilers of the grave. Again, any tampering with the grave is deemed blasphemous and dire consequences in the afterlife are pronounced against such intruders. Even the potential future occupants of the grave are the same: the court women or the queen. The only thing missing from Iabâ's inscription that is present in Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua's inscription are the exhortations to future generations to keep up the cult of the dead.

obv. lines 1–4
By the name of Šamaš, Ereškigala and the Anunnaki, the great gods of the underworld: Through death, the destiny of all living things overtook Iabâ the queen and she went to the path of her ancestors.

obv. lines 5–11
Whoever in the future – be it a queen who sits on the throne or a court woman, beloved of the king – removes me from my tomb or puts anyone else in with me, and reaches his hand toward my jewelry with evil intent or whoever breaks open the seal of this tomb;

obv. lines 11–14, rev. lines 1–8
above, let his spirit roam outside under the rays of the sun in thirst. And below in the underworld, may he not receive offerings with the Anunnaki. No libations of water, first-draft beer, wine or flour! May Ningišzida and Biṭuh the chief gatekeeper, the great gods of the underworld, afflict his corpse and ghost with eternal restlessness.

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7.1.5 Adad-guppi Inscription

This inscription is commonly referred to as a "pseudo-autobiography" of Adad-guppi, since although the text is written in the first person, it is clearly composed after the death of the protagonist. The actual author(s) of the text could have been either male or female. Nonetheless, the author(s) clearly casts Adad-guppi as a figure who was able to make a new literary composition. In other words, she is *depicted* as exercising independent agency.

The text originates from the Neo-Babylonian Empire, from the year 547 BCE. It was inscribed on two steles as part of the restoration project of the temple Ehulhul of Sîn in the city of Harran in upper Mesopotamia. Only one of the steles is well preserved. Both steles display remains of a relief on the upper part of the face. It seems possible that the image on the steles depicts King Nabonidus and his mother.

Below, this long composition is divided into smaller sections with sub-headings not present in the original text. The text begins by introducing the author, Adad-guppi, the mother of King Nabonidus. The actual narrative begins by reminding the readers of the ruin of city of Harran. This is followed by a description of Adad-guppi's faithful service to the gods and her request to the moon god Sîn to come back to Harran. The narrative then further recounts Adad-guppi's piety and Sîn's response to it: Sîn agrees to return. Sîn even elevates Adad-guppi's son to kingship so that he would restore the temple of Sîn in Harran. This is foretold in a dream, where Adad-guppi directly communicates with Sîn. As a final cherry on the top, Sîn grants her extreme longevity and health as a reward of her piousness. The next section of the text narrates Adad-guppi's request to Sîn to extend equal protection to her son. After this, the inscription reiterates Adad-guppi's loyal worship and recounts how she introduced his son to court. Adad-guppi's relationship to previous kings is distinctly daughter-like as she is portrayed as taking care of the offerings for the dead kings, a deeply familial matter in

Mesopotamia. At the end of the text, the perspective changes from first person to third person, stating that Adad-guppi died in the ninth regnal year of her son. After describing the funeral, the text ends with the "moral" of the story, a short paragraph exhorting its readers to worship Sîn.

The text is a very rare example of a woman portrayed as an author of a literary text. There are many reasons for its existence. The text helped establish the supremacy of Sîn, the moon god. In the first millennium, Sîn was not imagined as the leading god of the pantheon, but during Nabonidus's reign his importance certainly grew. The text can also be seen as having had a didactic purpose, illustrating how worship of Sîn could lead to rewards in this life. Additionally, the portrayal of Adad-guppi as the author relates to legitimization of her son's kingship through her. Adad-guppi is the mediator between Nabonidus and Sîn, which emphasizes her extraordinary piety. Furthermore, one should not underestimate the statement in the text that Adad-guppi took charge of the *kispu* ("funerary offerings") and *ginû* ("regular offerings") for the deceased kings. These were traditionally the responsibility of the direct descendants of the deceased, usually the eldest son and heir, although there are documented cases from the second millennium where daughters could take over these duties.[11] Since the usurper Nabonidus had no direct blood claim to the throne, it seems clear that in this text Nabonidus is legitimizing his claim for kingship through his blood tie to his mother. Adad-guppi is described as someone favored by the gods, Sîn in particular, and someone who fulfilled the role of an heir for the previous kings. This theme is known from the Neo-Assyrian court as well. Some of the royal mothers were portrayed as guarantors of legitimate succession due to their piety. The Neo-Assyrian queens also wielded power in social reality. Whether or not Adad-guppi wielded similar power in the Neo-Babylonian social reality remains an unanswered question, as there are no non-literary texts where she would appear.

Bibliography

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For Adad-guppi see: Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 68–79, 139–140, 197–198, 208–209; Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 102–103; Saana Svärd,

11 See further Brigitte Lion, "Sexe et genre (1). Des filles devenant fils dans les contrats de Nuzi et d'Emar," in *Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* (ed. F. Briquel-Chatonnet, S. Farès, B. Lion & C. Michel; TOPOI 10; Lyon: Diffusion De Boccard 2009), 9–25, at 17–18. See also the letter of a *nadītum*-woman earlier in this volume (6.3.2).

"Political Leadership: Ancient Near East," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Gender Studies*, vol. 2 (ed. Julia O'Brien; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17–23.

Introducing the author
Ex 1 col. 1 lines 1–6
I am Adad-guppi, the mother of Nabonidus, king of Babylon. (I am) the worshiper of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna, my gods, whose divinity I have sought after since my childhood. [12]

Ruin of Harran
Ex 1 col. 1 lines 6–9
On the 16th year of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon (= 610 BCE), Sîn the king of gods became angry with his city and his temple and rose up to heaven. The city and the people in it went to ruin.

Pious activities of Adad-guppi and her request to Sîn
Ex 1 col. 1 lines 10–21
I searched among the shrines of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna, being reverent to their divinity. I grasped the hem of Sîn, king of gods, and night and day I constantly sought after his great divinity. Daily, ceaselessly (I did this). I am indeed the worshiper of Sîn, Šamaš, Ištar, and Adad, as long as I live, in Heaven and on Earth! All the good things which they bestowed upon me, I (in turn) gave to them (each) day and night, month (after month) and year (after year). I grasped the hem of Sîn, king of gods and night and day my eyes were fixed on him. In supplication and (with) beseeching gestures (= lit. "nose-touching") I was bowing before them saying: "Please return to your (sg.) city so that the black-headed people may revere your great divinity."

Piousness of Adad-guppi for 95 years and finally an answer to her request to Sîn
Ex 1 col. 1 lines 21–28
To calm my god and my goddess, I refused to wear clothes of purple (argamannu) wool, a silver and gold ornament, a new garment, perfumes or good oil on my body. I was dressed in a torn garment and my outer garments were sackcloth. I praised them. The praise of my city god and goddess was established in my heart and I guarded their watch. I did not leave out any of my good things, but carried them before them.

Ex 1 col. 1 lines 29–34
Since the twentieth (regnal) year of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria (the year) in which I was born until the forty-second (regnal) year of Assurbanipal,

12 Line numbers in translation follow Schaudig. Ex 1 refers to the better preserved stele, Ex 2 to the less well preserved one.

(and until) the third (regnal) year of Aššur-etel-ilani his son, (and until) the twenty-first (regnal) year of Nabopolassar, (and until) the forty-third (regnal) year of Nebuchadnezzar, (and until) the second (regnal) year of Amēl-Marduk, (until) the fourth (regnal) year of Neriglissar; during (these) 95 years, I searched the shrines of his great divinity, (the shrines) of Sîn, the king of the gods of Heaven and Earth.

Ex 1 col. 1 lines 35–39
He gazed upon me joyfully (because of) my good deeds, he heard my prayer and granted my request. The rage in his heart calmed down and toward Ehulhul, temple of Sîn, which is in the midst of the city of Harran, the dwelling that is the joy of his heart, he became amicable (again and) took pity (on the city).

Fruits of her pious labor: rise of Nabonidus
Ex 1 col. 1 lines 39–46
Sîn, king of gods, gazed upon me (favorably) and called Nabonidus, my only son, my offspring, to kingship. He filled his hands with the kingship of the land of Sumer and the land of Akkad from the border of Egypt by the upper sea to the lower sea, the totality of all the lands. I lifted my hands to Sîn king of gods reverently in fervent prayer. . . . my offspring . . .

Dialogue with Sîn: A prophetic dream
Ex 1 col. 2 lines 1–4
"You indeed called him to kingship and pronounced his name. For the command of your great divinity, may the great gods walk on his side and make his enemies fall. May you not forget Ehulhul but complete the perfect rituals!"

Ex 1 col. 2 lines 5–11
When in my dreams his hands were set (upon me), Sîn the king of gods spoke to me thus: "The return of the gods is because of you. I will place the dwelling in Harran in the hands of Nabonidus your son. He will construct Ehulhul and make perfect its work. City of Harran he will make more perfect than before and restore it. He will grasp the hand of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna and he will make them enter Ehulhul."

Dream come true
Ex 1 col. 2 lines 11–21
I was attentive to the word which Sîn the king of gods spoke and indeed I saw it (happen)! Nabonidus, the only son, my offspring, perfected the forgotten rituals of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna. He rebuilt Ehulhul and made perfect its work. The city of Harran he made more perfect than before and restored it. He grasped the hand of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna from Babylon, city of his kingship, and made them dwell in joy and gladness within the city of Harran, to Ehulhul, the dwelling that is the joy of their hearts.

Fruits of her pious labor for herself
Ex 1 col. 2 lines 21–34
Never before had Sîn, the king of gods, done (such a thing) and given (such a gift) to anyone; because of my love, (me) who revered his divinity and grasped his hem, Sîn, the king of gods, lifted my head up and established a good name for me in the land. (Furthermore) he added to my (life) long days and years of heart's joy. Ever since (the reign) of Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, until the ninth year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, (my) son, my offspring; (all in all) he kept me alive 104 good years in (that) veneration which Sîn, the king of the gods had established in my heart. For myself, the sight in (my) eyes is bright, my insight is outstanding, my hands and feet are well, my words are well chosen, food and drink agree with me, my flesh is good and my heart is cheerful. I have seen the grandchildren of my grandchildren, alive until four generations and I am fully satisfied with extreme old age.

Petition to Sîn on behalf of her son
Ex 1 col. 2 lines 34–40
"Sîn, king of gods, you have gazed upon me benevolently and extended my days. I entrust Nabonidus, king of Babylon, my son to Sîn, my lord. As long as he lives, may he not do wrong against you. A benevolent male protective spirit (*šēdu*) and a benevolent female tutelary spirit (*lamassu*) which you appointed to me and who made me reach the extreme old age – appoint (them) with him (as well) and deliver him from the 'hand of offence' against your great divinity so that he may revere your great divinity."

Repetition: Adad-guppi's piousness motif and rise of Nabonidus
Ex 1 col. 2 lines 40–49
During the twenty-one (regnal) years of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, (and) during the forty-three (regnal) years of Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, and the four (regnal) years of Neriglissar, king of Babylon, (all of them) exercised kingship. (Thus, altogether for) sixty-eight years I revered them with all my heart. I guarded their watch [and] I made Nabonidus (my) son, my offspring, serve in front of Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, and Neriglissar, king of Babylon, and day and night he guarded their watch and he constantly and repeatedly did whatever pleased them. He established my name excellent before them.

Adad-guppi's role as the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar
Ex 2 col. 3 lines 8′–23′
They (Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar) elevated me (socially by treating me) like a daughter, (like) their offspring. Afterwards fate carried them away. No one among their children or among [their] people or their high officials whose possessions and wealth increased because they raised them (in high positions) – (not one of them) set the incense offering for them. (On the other hand,)

I indeed, every month, ceaselessly in my good clothes I made funerary offerings of oxen, fattened sheep, bread, beer, wine, oil, honey, and all kinds of fruits of the garden. I established lavish strewn offerings of sweet-smelling fragrance as their regular offerings, and I set it before them.

Death of Adad-guppi and the funeral
Ex 2 col. 3 lines 23′–26′, Ex 1 col. 3 lines 20–43

On the ninth year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, natural death carried her away. Nabonidus, king of Babylon, the son, her offspring, beloved of his mother, laid out her dead body for burial and . . . (the verb is missing, could be e.g., "he accompanied her body with") fine clothes, bright linen, a golden mural crown, bright . . ., fine stones, choice stones, (and) precious stones. With fragrant oil he anointed her body and he placed (it) in secret. He slaughtered oxen and fattened sheep. He gathered in front of her the people of Babylon (and) Borsippa and the rulers who dwell in far-away regions. [Princes] and governors from [the border] of Egypt by the upper sea to the lower sea he summoned and they instituted a mourning ceremony and . . . (and) a bitter wailing. And they raised a lamenting cry.

Seven days and seven nights constantly they made the pipes emit sound. Their clothes were covered [with dust]. When the seventh day [was reached], the people of the land shaved all the hair on their heads and . . . their clothes . . . And they placed their grave goods and entered into . . . With food . . . filtered aromatic oil they heaped up . . ., fragrant oil he poured on their heads, their hearts he made rejoice and brightened their features. He sent them to the way back to their lands and they returned to their homes.

Final words of wisdom addressed to the reader
Ex 1 col. 3 lines 43–56

[Whoever] you are, a king or a prince . . . Sîn, king [of gods], lord of the gods of Heaven and on Earth; his great divinity night and day, Šamaš, Adad and Ištar, lord of [Heaven] and Earth who . . ., who dwell in Esagil and Ehulhul – revere (them) and worship them in Heaven and Earth and the utterance of Sîn, god . . . your seed . . .

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7.1.6 Boundary Stone of Sammu-ramat and Adad-nerari III

This remarkable text was inscribed on a stone stele found 120 km north of ancient Aleppo, in modern Turkey. It seems probable that the find spot is the same as – or very close to – the spot where this boundary stone was originally erected in 805 BCE. The text translated here is inscribed on the obverse of the stele and recounts how the Assyrian Empire intervened on behalf of a local king called Uš̌pilulume. The Assyrians gained a victory over the enemy and erected the boundary stone as a marker for the border between the territory of king Uš̌pilulume and his neighbor, king Qalparuda. The text ends with a brief curse section against anyone who would dare tamper with it. The stele is inscribed on both sides. Here only the obverse is translated. The reverse was inscribed a few decades after the original inscription, during the reign of Adad-nerari III's successor king Shalmaneser IV, in 773 BCE. It recounts how the border was reestablished, apparently by an Assyrian commander on behalf of the king.

While the text is perfectly preserved, different views have been presented regarding the role of queen Sammu-ramat in the narrative. This is not the right forum for detailed analysis, but there are good grounds for interpreting the text as expressing the authority of the queen. The beginning of the inscription emphasizes her title and the boundary stone seems to have belonged to the king and Sammu-ramat together. When the violent battle action starts, the king is acting alone, in first person singular, but at the end of the text they jointly erect the stele.

Although somewhat debated among scholars, it seems that Sammu-ramat was a force to be reckoned with in Assyria, especially during the early years of the reign of her son Adad-nerari III (810–783). The other texts where her name has been preserved attest to her influence and importance in the Empire. Her role as the mother of the king was to guarantee the power of the dynasty and to make sure her son stayed on the throne. This enabled her to gain a more visible role in the realm than many other Neo-Assyrian queens. The text is unique in many respects and although it is clearly part of the literary tradition of royal inscriptions, it is definitely a display of independent authorial agency. The creator of the composition cannot be known for sure, but it seems plausible that the text was composed by the royal scribes, like all royal inscriptions. Their work could be supervised by their august patrons, in this case the king and Sammu-ramat, but to what degree, there is no way of knowing. The actual hard work of transferring the composition into stone was most probably done by craftspeople (possibly supervised by scribes) who did not need to know how to read the text in order to copy it.

The inscription is structured around and on top of an image: the standard of Sîn, the moon god. The depiction ran the length of the stele in an impressive pictorial display. Furthermore, the final lines of the text evoke only two deities; Aššur, the national god of Assyria, and Sîn, the moon god of Harran. Thus, Sîn's role is heavily emphasized in the inscription. This matched the general trend of Neo-Assyrian kings being supporters of Sîn's cult in Harran (located roughly 130 km east of the stele). Especially in the western parts of the Neo-Assyrian Empire Sîn of Harran was part of royal ideology.[13]

lines 1–7

Boundary stone of Adad-nerari, king of Assyria, son of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, (and the boundary stone of) Sammu-ramat, queen of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nerari, strong king, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser, king of the four quarters (of the earth).

lines 7–10

(This is what happened) when Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites, caused Adad-nerari, king of Assyria, (and) Sammu-ramat, the queen, to cross the Euphrates.

lines 11–15

I smote the battle formations (that were) with Ataršumki, son of Adramu, of the city of Arpad, and with the eight kings who were with him at the city of

13 See more on this in Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 213; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 139–142.

Paqarahubunu. I took away their military camp from them. They fled in order to save their lives.

lines 16–18
In the year (when this happened) they erected this boundary stone between Uššilulume, king of the Kummuhites, and Qalparuda, son of Palalam, king of the Gurgumites.

lines 19–23
Whoever takes (it) away from the possession of Uššilulume, his sons, (or) his grandsons: may the gods Aššur, Marduk, Adad, Sîn, (and) Šamaš not stand (by him) in his lawsuit. (To do such a thing would be) an anathema to Aššur my god (and to) Sîn, who dwells in Harran.

Bibliography

Text: Veysel Donbaz, "Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae in the Antakya and Kahramanmaraş Museums," *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 8 (1990):5–24 – includes photos, cuneiform copy, transliteration, notes, and translation into English; A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 204–205 (RIMA 3 A.0.104.3) – includes transliteration and translation into English.
Studies: Reinhard Bernbeck, "Sex/Gender/Power and Šammuramat: A View from the Syrian Steppe," in *Fundstellen: Gesammelte Schriften zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altvorderasiens ad honorem Hartmut Kühne* (ed. Dominik Bonatz, Rainer M. Czichon, and F. Janoscha Kreppner; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 351–369; Luis Robert Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nīrārī III: An Historical and Ideological Analysis of An Assyrian King and His Times* (CM 45; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 86–100; Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 48–51.

7.1.7 Naqi'a's Building Inscription

Naqi'a was the head of the queen's household during the reigns of three consecutive kings: Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669), and Assurbanipal (668–630). During the reign of Naqi'a's son Esarhaddon, his spouse assumed the title of queen until her death in 672 BCE. After that, Naqi'a again carried out the duties of queen at least until the death of her son and the early part of her grandson Assurbanipal's reign.

Texts involving or mentioning her make up roughly a third of all queen-related texts from the Neo-Assyrian period (approximately fifty texts). The majority of the texts come from the reign of her son Esarhaddon. Only one text possibly originates from the reign of Sennacherib. Likewise, from the reign of her grandson, Assurbanipal, there is little evidence. However, the most remarkable text relating to her comes from the very beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal, when she (appearing there with her Akkadian name Zakûtu) and the new king Assurbanipal imposed a loyalty oath on Assurbanipal's brothers and the whole court (see 9.2.1 for translation). This is the only Assyrian treaty that was enforced by someone other than the king, and it is clear evidence of her important role in governmental decision-making.

Her health was a topic of many letters to the king and in her own correspondence she received polite and flattering letters from high officials all over the Empire. From her correspondence with cultic professionals we can surmise that she was involved in arranging rituals and contributed to the economy of the temples. Among her contributions to the temples are dedications, two of which are translated in this chapter. It is possible that she had special authority in matters relating to Babylonia, although the evidence is ambivalent. Furthermore, Naqi'a was (uniquely among the Neo-Assyrian queens) the recipient of a number of prophecies. They were mostly confirmations of support regarding the civil war that Esarhaddon had to wage with his brother before assuming his father's throne (see 8.3.1–8.3.3). Also unique to Naqi'a is that statues of her were deposited in temples. The relationship between Naqi'a and her son seems to have been a relationship of mutual respect and perhaps even emotional attachment.[14] In any case, both of them must have had the same agenda: to keep Assyrian kingship in the family. Although Naqi'a is the best-documented Neo-Assyrian queen, most of her actions have parallels in the actions of other Neo-Assyrian queens. Thus, although queens like Naqi'a and Sammu-ramat are easily highlighted as exceptions, the textual and iconographic evidence suggests that the queen did have an official and prominent role throughout the Neo-Assyrian era.

One of the most remarkable texts relating to Naqi'a is her building inscription. The inscription starts with her full title: queen of Sennacherib, daughter-in-law of Sargon, and mother of Esarhaddon. After that, the narrative recounts the ascension of Esarhaddon to the throne, with the support of the main deities of the Assyrian pantheon. Naqi'a makes it clear that the building work was undertaken with the support and resources of her son. The inscription then proceeds to describe the building process and the banquet held there after the completion of the project. The contents and style of the text make it clear that the inscription is a

14 For this, see especially the letter from king Esarhaddon to his mother (SAA 16 2) and the discussion of it in Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, 56.

condensed version of a royal building inscription. This was hardly coincidental, but was meant to impress two things on the audience. It indicated that the mother of the king had a role in the realm that was close to the role of her son the king. At the same time the text indicated that she was working *with* the king. While Naqi'a was undoubtedly a stout supporter of her son, the other evidence relating to her indicates that she was a force to be reckoned with in her own right as well. Thus, her building inscription can be seen as a public acknowledgment of her authority, defining her position as the right arm of the king.

The text is known from three exemplars: pieces of two hexagonal prisms and a fragment of a clay cylinder. The texts were not necessarily exact duplicates, but close enough to make it possible to translate the text as a composite of the three. Giving exact line numbers would be too complicated for the purposes of this volume; instead we have divided the text into sections. It is possible that there is something missing at the beginning and/or at the end of the text as these are destroyed in all exemplars. However, the text that has been preserved seems to form the standard narrative of such inscriptions: first the introduction of the commissioner of the inscription, then the discussion on the process of building, and finally the celebrations following the completion of the building work. Thus, it seems likely that most of the inscription has survived.

Part I

(*unknown amount of text missing*) king ... [Naqi'a/Zakûtu,] queen ... Sennacherib, king of the universe, [king of] Assyria, daughter-in-law of Sargon, king of the universe, king of Assyria, mother of Esarhaddon, king of the universe, king of Assyria:

Part II

Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Nabû, and Marduk, Ištar of Nineveh, [Ištar of Arbela] gladly [seated] Esarhaddon, (my) son, my offspring, on the throne of his father. They exalted [his] good ... [From] the upper sea to the lower sea ... they went – there is no equal. They overwhelmed his [enemies] and they put the lead-rope on kings of the four quarters (of the earth).

Part III

The people from conquered lands, enemies plundered by his bow, which he (king Esarhaddon) gave to me as the share of my lordship, as a gift, I made them carry hoe and mud basket and they made mud-bricks.

Part IV

A cleared plot of land in the center of Nineveh behind the temple of Sîn and Šamaš [for] a royal [residence of] Esarhaddon, my [beloved son (*some text destroyed, probably describing the building process*)] I set over it. (In) its gates I

installed matching doors of cypress, a gift of my son. I built that residence. I made it perfect. I filled (it with) glamour.

Part V
I invited in it the gods dwelling in Nineveh: Aššur, Ninurta, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad and Ištar, Nabû and Marduk, and [I offered] glorious pure sacrifices before [them ...]. A ... male protective spirit (Akkadian *šēdu*) and a benevolent female tutelary spirit (Akkadian *lamassu*) took care of its interior and constantly looked after (it).

Part VI
I invited Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, my beloved son, into it and I installed (*a passage missing*) I caused to be installed. Whatever valuable (and) needed for the palace (and) appropriate for royalty; for Esarhaddon, my beloved son (*rest of the text missing*)

Bibliography

Text: Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 315–318, text nos. 2003 and 2004: includes transliteration and translation into English.
Studies: Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999), 37–41, 99 – includes discussion, transcription, and translation in English; Sarah Melville, "Women in Neo-Assyrian Texts," in *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Sourcebook* (ed. Mark Chavalas; Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World; London: Routledge, 2014), 229–231.
For Naqi'a and other Neo-Assyrian queens: Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999); Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 39–85.

7.1.8 A Neo-Assyrian Queen's Stele

Altogether, 140 steles were found at Assur, in an area ca. 100 m long. The dates of the steles range from ca. 1400 to ca. 600 and name kings and high officials of the the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian kingdoms. All of the inscriptions on the steles begin with either "image of PN" (*ṣalam* PN) or "belonging to PN" (*ša* PN), followed by titles and patronyms. The dates of the steles range from ca. 1400 to ca. 600 BCE.

The original purpose of the steles is not certain. It seems possible that they originally acted as representatives of the people in the temples and prayed on their behalf. This is supported by the word *ṣalmu* used in these stele inscriptions. It had a special meaning in Akkadian, referring to an image that was a kind of an essence of an individual, not just a representation.[15] Another option is that they were erected to mark time, being a king-list and a year-list of sorts.

In any case, erecting a stele was a privilege reserved for the most important members of the court. These steles include three steles of Neo-Assyrian women. They belonged to queens Sammu-ramat and Libbali-šarrat and an unidentified woman. We have chosen the oldest of these three steles for translation here. It is the stele of Sammu-ramat, who supported her son, Adad-nerari III (810–783), possibly by acting as a regent during the early years of his reign (see more details regarding her above, 7.1.6).

lines 1–7
Image of Sammu-ramat, queen of Šamši-Adad, king of the universe, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nerari, king of the universe, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser, king of the four quarters (of the earth).

Bibliography

Text: A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 226 (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2001) – includes transliteration and translation into English. See Walter Andrae, *Die Stelenreihen in Assur* (Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Assur; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913), 10–11 for a copy of cuneiform, transliteration, and translation in German, and on Tafel XI (no. 15712) a photo.
Studies: P. Miglus, "Another Look at the 'Stelenreihen' in Assur," *ZA* 74.1 (1984): 133–140; Julian Reade, "The Historical Status of the Assur Stelas," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen* (ed. Jan Dercksen; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 455–473; Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 75–77.

15 See further, Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 121–148, esp. 131.

7.2 Votive Inscriptions

Worshipers who visited a temple with a specific request of a deity sometimes donated a votive offering to the temple. Petitioners would give the objects to a priest, who would place it within the sanctuary. In most cases the object itself was related to the specific request the petitioner had and the petitioner would commission an inscription detailing their prayer. The object would then remain in the temple continuously reminding the deity of the petitioner's request even after the petitioner had gone back home. There are dozens of votive offerings that were donated by females.[16] Women offered cups and vases to the pre-Sargonic Inanna temple in Nippur. In the Ur III and Old Babylonian period women belonging to the families of senior governmental figures donated cups, dishes, and beads to various temples. Princesses gave a wide variety of objects to cultic spaces including bowls, female figurines, an alabaster disk, a golden beard, and a representation of female genitalia. We have selected three of these as representative examples. Additionally, there are many objects which were inscribed with the name of the queen. While these texts can be interpreted as "authored" from some perspective, these inscriptions are so brief that there is no point in translating them here.[17]

7.2.1 Female Genitalia

This seventeen-line inscription was written on a triangular plate of bronze found inside the Old Ištar temple at Assur. In this case, Haditum donated a bronze representation of genitalia in hopes that Ištar would protect her and, more specifically, her children. The inscription mentions the reign of Sargon I, which dates it to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

> When Sargon was the ruler of Assur, Haditum, the wife of Belumnada, donated this to the Assyrian Ištar, her lady. She brought this genitalia to the temple on account of the life of her husband, her own life, and the life of her children.

16 Brigitte Lion, "Literacy and Gender " in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 93–95.

17 For such inscriptions in the Neo-Assyrian evidence, see Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), Appendices, 175–242.

Bibliography

Text: A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)* (RIMA 1; Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987), 46.
Study: A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972), xxxv.

7.2.2 Mace Heads

Nin-kagina, queen of Lagaš, donated a number of mace heads and a female statuette (along with other objects) to various deities on behalf of two rulers of Lagaš: Ur-GAR (ca. 2117–2113) and Nammahani (ca. 2110–2109). Like most votive offerings, the objects were inscribed. The inscription on the mace heads is very formulaic and we offer one as an example. She dedicated the mace heads to the god Kindazi who was part of the entourage of the warrior god Ningirsu.

1–2
To Kindazi, her king.

3–10
Nin-kagina, daughter of Kaku, donated this on account of the life of Nammahani, ruler of Lagaš, and also for her life.

11–14
This mace head is named: "My master chose me; may he always lift me up."

Bibliography

Text: Dietz Otto Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty* (RIME 3/1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 199–200.
Study: M. Steible, *Die neusumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991), 377–378.

7.2.3 Female Statuette

Nin-kagina donated this statue to the healing goddess Bau on behalf of Nammahani.

1–5
To Bau, the beautiful woman, daughter of An, Lady of the Radiant City, her lady.

6–10
Nin-kagina, his servant, donated this on account of the life of Nammahani, the ruler of Lagaš:

"When the spirit of Tarsirsir enters Bau's courtyard, this statuette will turn to my lady and speak in her ear. May it speak my prayer to her."

Bibliography

Text: Dietz Otto Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty* (RIME 3/1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 198–99.
Study: M. Steible, *Die neusumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991), 374–375.

7.2.4 Queen Naqi'a's/Zakûtu's Dedicated Jewelry

There are six dedications made by the Neo-Assyrian queens. Mostly they are very brief, but in this volume we have selected three longer ones for translations. From the illustrious queen mother Naqi'a (see more about this remarkable queen above, 7.1.7) there are no less than four dedications of jewelry to the gods. Here we are translating a clay tablet found from Nineveh with two separate dedications commissioned by her. On one side of a clay tablet, it is recorded that Naqi'a dedicated an expensive pectoral of red gold for the goddess Belet-Ninua in Nineveh. The other side of the same tablet states that she – using her Akkadian name Zakûtu (a fairly direct translation from Naqi'a, "The Pure") – dedicated a richly decorated piece of gold jewelry to the goddess Mullissu in the city of Assur. Both dedications were made for the life of Esarhaddon and for her own life. Additionally, a banded agate bead bears Zakûtu's inscription to an unknown deity and a "piece of stone" records Naqi'a's dedication to the goddess Belet-Babili, but these short inscriptions are not translated in the volume.[18] Among other Neo-Assyrian queens a dedication from Libbali-šarrat to an unknown deity is translated below. A dedication from Sammu-ramat to Ištar[19] is also known as well as a very poorly preserved dedication to a deity by a sister of a Neo-Assyrian king.[20]

18 For them, see Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 320–322 (text nos. 2007 and 2008).
19 Michael Seymour, "Babylon's Wonders of the World: Classical Accounts," in *Babylon: Myth and Reality* (ed. Irving Finkel and Michael Seymour; London: British Museum, 2008), 104 (photo and translation).
20 Ann Searight, Julian Reade, and Irving Finkel, *Assyrian Stone Vessels and Related Material in the British Museum* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 99, no. 614.

obv. lines 1–2
To the goddess Belet-Ninua residing in the temple Emašmaš, the great Lady, her Lady.

obv. lines 2–5
Naqi'a, queen of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Sargon, king of the universe, king of Assyria; she commissioned a pectoral of red gold, which was inlaid with precious stones (and) which weighed 3¾ minas.

obv. lines 6–8
For the life of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, her son, and (for) herself, for her life, (for) the stability of her reign, (and for) the well-being of her offspring: (this is why) she placed (it in the temple) and dedicated (it).

rev. line 1
To the Queen, the goddess Mullissu residing in the temple Ešarra, the great Lady, her Lady.

rev. lines 2–7
Zakûtu, queen of Sennacherib, king of the universe, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Sargon, king of the universe, king of Assyria, mother of Esarhaddon, king of the universe, king of Assyria; she commissioned a golden *algumes*-ornament which was inlaid with obsidian, . . . -stones, carnelian, agate, *papparminu*-stones, . . . -stones, lapis-lazuli (and) which weighed 1½ minas.

rev. lines 7–9
For the life of Esarhaddon [king of Assyria, her son], and (for) herself, for her life, (for) the lengthening of [her days,] (for) the stability of her reign, (and for) the well-being of her offspring: (this is why) she placed (it in the temple) and dedicated (it).

Bibliography

Text: Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 318–320 (text nos. 2005 and 2006). Includes transliteration and translation into English.
Studies: For Naqi'a and other Neo-Assyrian queens, see Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999); Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 39–85.

7.2.5 From Queen Libbali-šarrat to an Unknown Deity

This dedication is commissioned by Libbali-šarrat. She was the queen of Assurbanipal (668–630), the king of the mighty Neo-Assyrian Empire which governed most of the area between Persian Gulf and Mediterranean during the seventh century BCE. Two of the Neo-Assyrian queens, Naqi'a and Libbali-šarrat, make dedications for their "reign" (*palû* in Akkadian). While the term in no way diminished the role of the king as the Lord of the Empire, it does indicate (along with other evidence) that the queens had institutionalized authority in the realm. As the king had his *palû*, so did the queen have hers.[21]

The letter from the princess Šeru'a-eṭirat to Libbali-šarrat (see translation in 6.7.1) is addressed to her when she was still crown prince Assurbanipal's wife and it implies that she was groomed for her position as queen already during that time. The two most remarkable documents relating to Libbali-šarrat are her stele (see Sammu-ramat's stele inscription above, 7.1.8) and this votive text. Furthermore, two out of three large-scale representation of Neo-Assyrian queens portray Libbali-šarrat. Her image is engraved on her stele in Assur (the only Assur stele with an image) and she is portrayed together with Assurbanipal in a garden scene relief that decorated the royal palace. Her prominence in the iconographic evidence reflects her importance at court and portrays the Neo-Assyrian queens as active and high-ranking members of the court.

The inscription translated below is only partially preserved but because of the clear reference to her spouse Assurbanipal, it is clear that the name has to be restored as Libbali-šarrat. The exact nature of the object dedicated is not preserved but alloy of gold and copper ("red gold") was used in its making, so it was an object of great value. This cuneiform tablet could have accompanied the object to the temple, as it is not inscribed on the object itself. Only the obverse of the clay tablet is inscribed.

line 1
[To the goddess X] the great [Lady], her Lady.

lines 2–5
[Libbali-šarrat, queen of] Assurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, [she commissioned (*one or two words missing*) of] red gold [for the life of] Assurbanipal, her beloved, [for the lengthening of his days], (for) old age of his throne.

lines 5–8
And for herself, for her life, (for) lengthening of her days, (for) stability of her reign. (So that) her speech is made pleasing to the king, her husband, and (so that) they grow old together.

21 Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, 81–82.

line 8
(This is why) she placed (it in the temple) and dedicated (it).

Bibliography

Text: Kalrheinz Deller, "Zum ana balāṭ – Formular einiger assyrischer Votivinschriften," *Oriens Antiquus* 22 (1983): 22–24.
Study: Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 60–61, 208–216.

CHAPTER 8

Oracles

Three characteristics distinguish oracles from other forms of writing: (1) the implied speaker is a deity, (2) the implied addressee is a human, and (3) the medium of communication is through a human.[1] Accordingly, oracles are examples of individual agency. This is a crucial aspect that goes to the very heart of the genre itself.

We include two groups of texts in this chapter that reflect two different ways in which women relate to authorship. The first and less problematic category includes oracles that were given by women which were also transmitted by females (the oracles were embedded within letters commissioned by women) or in one case actually written down by a woman. The second category includes oracles given by women that were written down by male scribes. In our scheme of authorship discussed in chapter three this reflects what men thought women should be communicating to the world. We are aware that including such a category is a slippery slope since one could argue that we should include all kinds of texts that were written/authored by men but which include quotations from women's speech. Including many such texts could easily dilute our focus on female authorship. This danger notwithstanding, we have included this second category of oracles because of the prominent role that women had in Mesopotamian prophecy and because we believe that these oracles were a kind of directed/formalized speech not unlike many of the inscriptions that we have included. As such they tell us something about women's role as authors.

Not only were oracles presented as actual messages from deities but the identity of the prophets who mediated the messages was extremely important as well. In almost every case the name of the prophet was included along with the oracle. Furthermore, in the kingdom of Mari, if a summary or quote of an oracle was sent in a letter, oftentimes a lock of the prophet's hair or a tassel from his or her garment was included in order to provide

1 Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 8 and Charles Halton, "Allusions to the Stream of Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Oracles," *ANES* 46 (2009): 52.

proof of the prophet's identification or, more likely in our opinion, to facilitate a divinatory inquiry concerning the legitimacy of the oracle.[2] Locks of hair and pieces of garments were enclosed more often when an oracle was delivered by a female or an *assinnu* (an individual whose gender identity was not unequivocally masculine). It seems that at Mari oracles delivered by males were considered more reliable than those given by women or individuals with ambiguous gender identity.[3]

Almost all of the extant oracles from Mesopotamia were directed at or concern issues surrounding the royal family. Whether the king's reign would endure and whether or not the deities were graciously disposed toward him were common topics that prophets addressed. Therefore, typically, the prophetic messages display instrumental agency since they continued the long literary tradition of delivering divine support to the current regime. Even though most of the oracles relayed messages of consolation to the addressees, prophets still felt free to bluntly share critical messages as well. Within the Mari corpus a prophet ate a raw leg of lamb in front of the city elders and said that unless the city returned taboo material they would experience a devouring.[4] This must have been a challenging and potentially embarrassing message since the scribe who copied the oracle in a letter noted that the prophet did not give the message in private but in public. Prophets were normally supplied with beer, food, and clothing for their services but they voiced their frustrations when they felt unappreciated or under-remunerated. In a letter to a king of Mari, Zimri-Lim, the scribe quoted a prophet who complained, "I live amidst an abundance of shit and piss eating only chaff."[5]

It is unclear whether Mesopotamian oracles were spontaneous or were facilitated in some way. Most of the oracles from the Neo-Assyrian period come from individuals connected with the Ištar temple in Arbela near Nineveh or the Aššur temple in the city named after this god, Assur. These individuals were likely religious professionals who acted as mediums for the deity they served. It is unknown whether or not these prophets tried to provoke an oracle by some means. On the other hand, the oracles from Mari include at least several laypersons. Furthermore, a couple of oracles report that the prophets drank a substance before relating their prophecies. It is unclear what exactly these libations were but many scholars have

2 For a discussion of the former idea see Abraham Malamat, "Prophecy in the Mari Documents," *Eretz-Israel* 4 (1956): 81, 84 (in Hebrew) and for the latter see William L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica* 50 (1969): 22–23.

3 Esther Hamori, "Gender and the Verification of Prophecy at Mari," *Die Welt des Orients* 42 (2012): 1–22.

4 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 38–39.

5 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 29, our translation.

speculated that they were alcoholic drinks that were thought to facilitate the reception of divine oracles.[6]

Typically, a prophet would orally convey a prophecy to an individual or group. If a scribe thought that the message was significant enough to be saved or that a royal official should be aware of the oracle, he would write it down on a small tablet, presumably verbatim. The oracle would later be incorporated into a letter or would be recopied along with other prophecies onto a larger, multi-columned tablet and stored within an archive. Most prophecies were likely never written down and only a tiny fraction of the oracles that were spoken within ancient Mesopotamia survive to this day.

Women were very active prophets and this anthology presents examples of oracles attributed to females. In addition to female prophets there are a couple instances in which the gender of the prophet is unclear. Either the scribe made a mistake when identifying the person (for instance, indicating that the person giving the oracle was a man but then using a female determinative before the personal name) or these individuals did not fit in a binary scheme of genders. It is clear that biological sex and performed gender are not always unequivocally connected within the ancient world. However, there is at the moment no scholarly consensus on the question of whether or not prophesy and ambiguous gender were intrinsically linked in Mesopotamia.[7] The potential connection between gender and prophecy is intriguing and important when researching how gender was performed and established in Mesopotamia. However, we are focusing our discussion in this volume on the expressions of female authorship. When examining writing, authorship, and female gender, the question of ambiguous gender and prophecy has to stay on the sidelines.

In this chapter we translate altogether twelve letter-reports from the kingdom of Mari that dealt with prophecy. There are also letters dealing with prophecy in the other large oracle corpus from Mesopotamia, namely the Neo-Assyrian. However, we have focused on other texts from the Neo-Assyrian period, since in these letters the topic of oracles plays a minor role or the text is very poorly preserved. Therefore, we have chosen to translate three Neo-Assyrian oracles recorded in an oracle collection, two reports on oracles, and an oracular query written by a woman.

6 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 41 note b.

7 See, for example, Jonathan Stökl, "Gender 'Ambiguity' in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy? A Reassessment of the Data behind a Popular Theory," in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho; Ancient Israel and Its Literature 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 59–79.

8.1 Female Oracles Transmitted by Women

8.1.1 Water Under Straw

In this oracle Inib-šina, the half-sister of the king of Mari and the high priestess of Adad, warned her brother not to trust "the man of Ešnunna," the king of a rival city-state. The letter is addressed to "my Star," which was a nickname for Zimri-Lim, king of Mari. Only close female relatives of Zimri-Lim used this address, which may imply that Inib-šina wrote this letter herself. Zimri-Lim did not take his sister's advice and went ahead and accepted a peace deal with the king of Ešnunna, Ibalpiel. Also extant is an oracle that Ibalpiel received from a different prophet, who reassured him that he would control the lands around him and establish peace.[8]

1–2
Say to my Star: Inib-šina:

3–10
A while ago Šelebum, the *assinnu*,[9] gave me an oracle and I recounted it to you. Now a *qammatum*[10] of Dagan of Terqa came to me. She said:

11–19
"The overture of peace by the man of Ešnunna is treacherous – Beneath straw runs water! – and I will catch him in a net that I tie up. I will ruin his city and plunder the wealth that was accumulated over generations."

20–27
This is what she said. Now, watch yourself. Do not enter the city without a (favorable) oracle. I have heard people saying, "He's always trying to show off." Do not show off!

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 7.
Study: Jack M. Sasson, "Water beneath Straw: Adventures of a Prophetic Phrase in the Mari Archives," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical,*

8 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 66.

9 The term *assinnu* is not well understood but it seems to refer to members of the cult of Ištar who performed in rituals, Saana Svärd and Martti Nissinen, "(Re)constructing the Image of the *assinnu*," in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

10 The term *qammatum* is not well understood. However, Jack M. Sasson speculates that in this letter "a *qammatum* is paired with an *assinnum*, and so *qammatum* may refer to a woman with gender-neutral sensibility, the counterpart to an *assinnum*" (*From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 263 n83).

Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield (ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 599–608.

8.1.2 Enemies Circling the Border

This is another letter written by Inib-šina to her half-brother Zimri-Lim. Inib-šina conveys a prophecy from the female prophet Innibana who voluntarily supplies Inib-šina with a lock of hair and a piece of fringe from her garment. Inib-šina forwards these to Zimri-Lim along with the prophecy which Innibana gave. Inib-šina encourages her brother to commission an expert to perform a ritual with the hair and garment fringe which would, presumably, determine if the prophecy was legitimate or not.

1–3
Speak to my Star, Inib-šina:

4–5
Innibana the female prophet stood up and declared:

6–18
"Zimri-Lim, until his thieves and enemies which are swarming his borders . . . (*three lines are broken*) . . . he is not to travel . . . he is not to purchase, he is not to save. Now, I give you (pieces of) my hair and fringe of my garment – let the purification be performed."

19–26
And now I have sent the hair and garment fringe to my Star. My Star should commission an oracle and my Star should act according to the oracle. May my Star look after himself.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 14.
Study: Simon B. Parker, "Official Attitudes toward Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," *VT* 43 (1993): 63.

8.1.3 A Drunken Oracle

Šiptu, the wife of king Zimri-Lim, writes this letter to her husband reporting on her inquiries to oracular prophets concerning Zimri-Lim's plans for war against Išme-Dagan. Išme-Dagan was the son of one of the

greatest Assyrian kings, Šamši-Adad I. Šamši-Adad I had installed his son as the governor of Ekallatum. The exact location of Ekallatum is unknown but it was near Assur and was used as a military outpost that protected the Assyrian kingdom from their most dangerous enemy, the kingdom of Ešnunna.[11] Šiptu gave drinks to two prophets in order to foster an oracle. The exact nature of this liquid is debated. Some scholars believe it was alcohol while others believe it was water which contained a dissolved substance. Perhaps the question posed to the prophets was written down and the ink washed off into the water Šiptu provided them (cf. Numbers 5:23–24)?

1–2
Say to my lord: Šiptu, your servant:

3–12
Concerning the report of the war which my lord is carrying out, I gave drinks to a male and female to foster an omen. The response was very positive to my lord. I also inquired of a male and female on behalf of Išme-Dagan. His response was not positive and his report was: "He will be thrown under my lord's feet."

13–17
They said: "My lord raised the rod.[12] Against Išme-Dagan he raises the rod and says: 'I will beat you with the rod. Wrestle as hard as you can but in this wrestling I will beat you.'"

18–34
I said: "Will my lord come near the battle?" They said: "There will be no battle. As soon as his (Zimri-Lim's) reinforcements arrive they (Išme-Dagan's troops) will be scattered. Išme-Dagan's head will be cut off and thrown under the feet of my lord saying: 'The army of Išme-Dagan is large but even if his army is large his reinforcements have scattered it.' My reinforcements are Dagan, Šamaš, Itur-Mer, Belet-ekallim, and Adad, the Lord of Decisions, who walk beside my lord."

35–45
What if my lord would say: "She made them talk through force."?[13] But I didn't make them talk about a thing. They talked on their own and they

11 Trevor Bryce, *The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 216–217.

12 The meaning of the word we have translated as rod, *humāšam*, is uncertain. From the context it seems to be a weapon used in a contest or confrontation. Other translations of this term include "wrestling grappling hook" and "cane." See Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959–1981), 1412.

13 The phrase we have translated as "through force" is uncertain. See the discussion in Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 41 note g.

agreed on their own. They said: "Išme-Dagan's reinforcements are prisoners. When they fall into rebelliousness and insurrection with him they will not accept his message. Before my lord his army will be scattered."

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 17.
Study: Jean-Marie Durand, "In Vino Veritas," *RA* 76 (1982), 43–5; Jean-Marie Durand, "La religión en Siria durante la época de los reinos amorreos según la documentación de Mari," in *Semitas occidentales,* vol. 2/1: *Mitología y religión del Oriente Antiguo* (ed. P. Mander and J.-M. Durand; Sabadell: AUSA, 1994), 329–30; Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 49–500.

8.1.4 A Servant Girl's Frenzy

This is another letter from Šiptu, Zimri-Lim's wife. In this report, a young girl is said to have given a prophetic oracle in a frenzy. The girl experienced the frenzy in the temple of Annunitim-in-the-City. Annunitim was an epithet of Inanna/Ištar and there are two temples to Annunitim mentioned in the Mari archives – an urban house of worship and a peripheral sanctuary in the countryside that was used irregularly. As in the oracle above (8.1.2) a piece of the prophet's hair and garment fringe were sent along with this letter. Belet-ekallim was a goddess who was thought to protect the king and his house.

1–4
Say to my lord: Šiptu your servant:

5–18
In the temple of Annunitim-in-the-City, Ahatum, Dagan-Malik's servant girl, went into a frenzy and said: "Zimri-Lim, even if you neglect me, I will embrace you. I will deliver your enemy into your hand. I will catch the free people who steal from me. I will gather them into the confines of goddess Belet-ekallim."

19–28
The next day the temple administrator, Ahum, gave me this message, along with the hair and garment fringe, which I have reported to my lord. I sealed the hair and garment fringe and sent them to my lord.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 24. For transliteration and

translation in French, see Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1* (Archives royales de Mari 26; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), text no. 214. For cuneiform copy, see Georges Dossin, *Archives royales de Mari: 10: la correspondance féminine* (Textes cunéiformes 31; Paris: Geuthner, 1967), text no. 8.
Study: Jonathan Stökl, "Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East," in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel* (ed. John Day; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 50–51.

8.1.5 Do Not Go On Campaign

Addu-duri, the queen mother, sent this letter to her son to report a dream that she believed was prophetic. The dream had two parts. In the first part Addu-duri saw herself entering the temple of Belet-ekallim. She was distressed when she learned that the deity and her image were not present. In the second part Addu-duri returned to the Belet-ekallim temple and saw the temple manager for the manifestation of Ištar in the city of Bišra. Addu-duri heard a strange voice, which may indicate, if we assume that the voice came from Dada, that Dada was appearing to her as a ghost. The temple manager implored the god Dagan to return. The queen mother then recounts an oracle given by a female prophet in the Annunitim temple. The female prophet warns the king not to go out on a military campaign. Addu-duri adds her own caution at the end of this report. Along with this letter the queen mother includes a lock of hair and a fringe for her son to use in divination to confirm the accuracy of or response to her dream.

1–2
Say to my lord: Addu-duri, your servant:

3–20
Since the destruction of your father's house I have not seen this kind of dream. My previous signs are of two parts: (1) In my dream I entered the temple of Belet-ekallim. Belet-ekallim was not present and there were no images representing her. And seeing this I started to cry. This dream was during the evening watch. (2) I returned (to the temple) and Dada, the temple manager for Ištar of Bišra, was standing in the gate of Belet-ekallim. A strange voice kept calling out: "Return, Dagan, return, Dagan!" It kept calling out.

21–28
Something else: a female prophet stood in the Annunitim temple and said: "Zimri-Lim, do not go on campaign! Stay in Mari and I will keep responding." My lord should not be negligent in watching out for himself.

29–33
Now, I myself have sealed my hair and my fringe and sent them on to my lord.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 42.
Study: Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 84–86.

8.1.6 Send Them Downstream

A female servant to the queen mother sent this letter which reports a dream that she believed had prophetic significance. Unfortunately, the tablet is broken precisely in the place where Timlû recounts her dream. In addition to the dream Timlû addresses a couple of other issues, one of which is a desire to have a headband from Addu-duri so that she may smell her lady's fragrance and be cured of homesickness.

1–3
Say to Addu-duri, my lady: Timlû, your servant:

4–12
It definitely was a sign when Yar'ip-Abba sent me out from Kasapa and I went to you. I said to you: "I apprehended a dream that concerns you. In my dream Belet-ekallim told me to report: . . . "

(at least four lines of this text are broken)

4′–7′
. . . men from Durum-labirum who carry tablets. Entrust her to these six free men and send them downstream to her.

8′–14′
Something else: convey to me your headband. Let me smell the fragrance of my lady; may it quicken my dead heart.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 45.
Study: Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 222–223.

8.1.7 An Oracular Query by a Woman in the Neo-Assyrian Period

The text presented here is a Neo-Assyrian oracular query from the reign of Assurbanipal (668–630 BCE). The text relates to the divinatory practice of extispicy, where the liver of a sacrificial beast was searched for positive and negative indicators. By carrying out a careful analysis, the cultic professionals who specialized in this rigorous scholarly pursuit were able to perceive a positive or negative answer in the liver. Before the sacrifice was carried out, a query to a god was written. Usually it was addressed to Šamaš, the god of justice and divination. The query was presumably placed in the presence of the god in the temple before the ritual slaughter of the animal.

There are quite a few such queries known from the Neo-Assyrian era.[14] However, the query translated here is very different from most.[15] First, it was addressed to a god named Manlaharbanuni, who is not mentioned anywhere else. Furthermore, the other queries are longer and use a selection of stock phrases, which this text lacks almost completely.

For example, these queries always had "disregard" lines that aimed at negating any mistakes or unfavorable circumstances in the divinatory proceedings. The only one in this text is unique: the "disregard" line at the end of the text beseeches the god to overlook that a woman wrote the query. It seems that someone who is not well trained in writing oracular queries is putting desperate questions to higher powers. The main content of this question to the god is, whether there is any danger from internal strife to the writer of the text, or king Assurbanipal. It does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that the woman was someone close to Assurbanipal. His queen, Libbali-šarrat, is known to have been an educated, literate woman. The same can be assumed of his sister, Šeru'a-eṭirat, who encouraged Libbali-šarrat in her studies even before she became queen (the letter is translated above, see 6.7.1). Based on the last sentence, imploring the god to ignore the unfortunate circumstance of a woman writing the query, it seems that a woman actually wrote the text, not only dictated it. Thus, she is unmistakably exercising independent agency. She is relying on the long tradition of writing oracular queries, but she has created at the same time a truly unique text.

obv. lines 1–2

I ask you, god Manlaharban:

14 Altogether 352 queries are translated in the volume by Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990).

15 Note that SAA 4 322 is very similar to the text translated here. However, the texts were written by different persons, perhaps by two different women both concerned with Assurbanipal.

obv. lines 2–6
This talk of insurrection against Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, was reported as follows: "They are rebelling against you!"

obv. line 6
Is it decreed and confirmed?

rev. lines 1–3
Will it occur? Is it reliable? Will they catch me? Will I die? Will they seize me in the course of it?

rev. lines 4–5
Disregard that a woman has written it and placed it before you.

Bibliography

Text: Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990), 298–299, text no. 321. For a photo, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P334866.
Studies: Saana Svärd, "Female Agency and Authorship in Mesopotamian Texts," *KASKAL* 10 (2013): 269–280. For more information on the queries, see Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sungod*, xiii–xxviii. For Mesopotamian divination, a good starting point is: Niek Veldhuis, "Reading the Signs," in *All Those Nations . . . Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East: Studies Presented to Han Drijvers at the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students* (ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout; COMERS/ICOG Communications 2; Groningen: Styx, 1999), 161–174.

8.2 Female Oracles Transmitted by Men: Oracles from Mari

8.2.1 Schemes of Subterfuge

Sammetar sent this letter to his boss, Zimri-Lim the king of Mari. He reports on the oracles of two prophets, one male, one female, of the god Dagan. Dagan's precise function is unclear but he may have had some association with the underworld since his temple at Terqa was called *é-kisaga*, "house of the funerary offerings."

The cities mentioned in this letter are fairly well-known sites within the city-state of Mari in modern-day Syria. Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 BCE) worshiped Dagan at Tuttul and he, along with a later king, built palaces here. Southeast of Tuttul was Terqa, a major economic center and also the site of a

temple to Dagan. Saggaratum was the third most prominent city within the kingdom of Mari after Mari and Terqa. Its exact location is unknown but it was likely near the confluence of the Habur and Euphrates.

The female prophet mentioned in this correspondence warns king Zimri-Lim not to trust a rival king, the "man of Ešnunna." She says that even though he offers peace, he plans subterfuge in his heart. In return for her service to the king the female prophet requests payment in the form of a nose ring and a garment.

1–4
Say to my lord: Sammetar your servant:

5–15
Lupahum, the prophet of Dagan, came here from Tuttul. My lord sent him a message in Saggaratum: "Convey me to Dagan of Terqa." He (Lupahum) brought this message and they answered him: "Wherever you go well-being will meet you. Battering ram and siege tower will be given to you. They will go by your side; they will go as your companions." With this message they answered him in Tuttul.

16–28
When he arrived from Tuttul I had him taken to Dir and he brought my lock to Diritum. Previously he brought a wooden object and said (to Diritum): "The wooden object is not functional; it is soaked with water. Strengthen the wooden object!" Now he brought my lock and this was his instruction: "Surely you are not so twisted that you trust the peace overtures from the man of Ešnunna? Your guard should be stronger than before."

29–40
To me he spoke: "Surely the king will not join himself with the man of Ešnunna without consulting the lord. Like when the Yaminites came to me and settled in Saggaratum and I spoke to the king: 'Do not make a treaty with the Yaminites! I will drive the shepherds back into the Hubur and the river will finish them off for you.' Now, he should not join himself without consulting the lord." This is the message Lupahum told to me.

41–57
After this, the next day, a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came and spoke to me: "Beneath straw runs water! They keep sending you peace overtures – they even dispatched their gods to you – but in their hearts they are scheming subterfuge. The king should not join himself without consulting the lord." She requested a piece of clothing and a nose ring, which I gave her. Then she gave her instructions to the high priestess Inib-šina at the temple of Belet-ekallim. The report of the message she told me I have sent to the presence of my lord. May my lord consider this and act according to his great kingship.

58–63
Regarding Yansib-Dagan – the elite soldier from Dašran whose head my lord told me to cut off – I sent Abi-Epuh at once. They didn't see this man so he (Abi-Epuh) sold his (Yansib-Dagan's) estate and the people attached to it into slavery. The next day a tablet arrived from Yasim-Dagan: "The man has arrived." Now, let my lord direct me whether or not I should release his people.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 9.
Studies: Jack M. Sasson, "Water beneath Straw: Adventures of a Prophetic Phrase in the Mari Archives," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 599–608; Martti Nissinen, "Das kritische Potential in der altorientalischen Prophetie," in *Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel* (ed. M. Köckert and M. Nissinen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 27–28.

8.2.2 A Wind Will Rise Against The Land

This letter was sent by the manager of a temple of Annunitim, Annunitim being an epithet of Inanna/Ištar. Two temples to Annunitim are mentioned in the Mari archives – an urban house of worship and a peripheral sanctuary in the countryside that was used irregularly. The temple manager reports an oracle given by the female prophet Hubatum which cautions king Zimri-Lim about a coming confrontation. The female prophet mentions the Sim'alites and Yaminites, which were two subgroups of the Hanean tribe which made up most of the political and military leadership in Mari. Possibly she alludes to tension between these groups.

1–4
Say to my lord: Ahum, temple manager of Annunitim, your servant:

5–6
Hubatum, the female prophet, gave the following oracle:

7–16
"A wind will stir against the land and I will test its wings and its two . . . let Zimri-Lim and the Sim'alite reap the harvest. Do not let the entire land slip out of your hand, Zimri-Lim."

17–20
She said again: "Yaminites, why do you cause worry? I will test you."

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 10.
Study: Hans Barstad, "Den gammeltestamentliga profetismen belyst ved paralleller fra Mari," in *Professor, dr. theol. Arvid Tångberg (1946–2000) in Memoriam* (ed. T. Stordalen and O. Skarsaune; Tidsskrift for teologi og kirke 72:12; Oslo, 2001), 51–67.

8.2.3 I Will Restore Abundance and Plenty

Unfortunately, the beginning and end of this text is broken. The part that is left includes a portion of an oracle given by a woman (*sinništum*). It seems that the city of Nahur, near Harran in northwest Mesopotamia, is under threat. Nahur functioned as "the confederal sanctuary of several Hanean clans" yet it appears that the king of Mari is neglecting it.[16] The woman urges the king to send an offering to Nahur as well as to grant other requests that she has previously conveyed. If the king complies, she reports that the deity she serves will insure that the king is victorious over his enemies and abundance will return to the land.

(the first ten lines of this text are broken)

11–13
"... in the heart of my temple ... he gave. The door which ... he sent to me ...

14–26
Since your childhood I have cared for you; I am constantly taking you to wherever there is safety. Yet, you do not grant my requests I put to you. Now, send an offering to Nahur and grant my request which I have asked of you. For what I supplied to your fathers, I will supply to you. Whatever enemies there are I will pile under your feet. I will restore abundance and plenty to your land."

27–31
This is how the the woman talked and I have recorded her words for my lord. I have presently sent her, along with hair and a garment fringe, to my lord. My lord should perform the oracles and my lord should act accordingly.

16 Karel van der Toorn, "Migration and the spread of Local Cults," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński* (ed. K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 368.

32–40
Something else: about the grain I keep writing my lord about – the grain has not been delivered. Now Yaptur has switched sides from Sarum to Buš'an, which makes clear their antagonism. A man came to me in secret and told me: "With four thousand or five thousand troops . . . we advanced to Nahur . . ."

(the remainder of the tablet is destroyed)

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 27.
Studies: Karel van der Toorn, "Migration and the Spread of Local Cults," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński* (ed. K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 365–378; Jonathan Stökl, "Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East," in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel* (ed. John Day; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 50.

8.2.4 A Woman's Dream

This letter recounts a dream report. The woman dreamt that two deceased prophets were still alive and went before the cows that belonged to the goddess Abba. They told the cows to speak to their fetuses to insure that the king of Mari experienced a full harvest. In Mari, still-born calves were examined to see if they foretold a bountiful harvest. The two prophets in the dream tell their mothers to make sure that their fetuses bring the right message. Not much is known about the goddess Abba other than that she was worshiped at Mari and had a temple at Isin during the Old Babylonian period.

1–3
[Say to my lord:] Addu-duri:

4–20
(The woman) . . . bila'u had a dream. This is what she said: "In my dream Hadnu-El and Iddin-Kubi the prophets were still alive. They went before the cows of Abba and said: 'Speak to your fetuses and let Zimri-Lim cultivate a full harvest. Zimri-Lim . . .'"

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 35.
Study: Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 64.

8.2.5 Do Not Worry

In this letter a scribe relays to Kibri-Dagan, the governor of Terqa, a report that he received from a female free person (*awīltum*). This woman was married and was apparently a "layperson." She directs the scribe to write down her message and send it to the king. She begins by telling the king not to worry. Unfortunately, the rest of her message is broken.

1–4
Say to my lord: Kibri-Dagan, your servant:

5–16
When I sent this tablet over to my lord before nightfall,[17] a free woman, the wife of a free man, came to me and said about Babylon: "Dagan sent me. Write to your lord that he should not worry and neither should the land worry. Hammurapi, king of Babylon . . .

(at least one line is broken)

1′–2′
. . . is hastening his demise."

Bibliography

Text and translation: Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 20.
Study: Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Companion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 222.

8.3 Female Oracles Transmitted by Men: Oracles from the Neo-Assyrian Period

Most of our information regarding Neo-Assyrian oracles and prophecy comes from oracle collections. As noted above, these collections were probably compiled by men based on notes, earlier reports, and other documents. It seems that only pro-establishment oracles were preserved in these archival collections. In addition to the oracle collections there are a few other texts that contain information about Neo-Assyrian prophets.[18] For instance, there are five letters that include snippets

17 This phrase literally reads "before the mountains cast their shadow."
18 For the full corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts relating to oracles and prophecy, see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 97–177.

from prophecies performed by females.[19] The most intriguing of these is found in a letter to king Esarhaddon. In this letter the writer reports that a female servant had spoken an oracle of destruction against the king: "This is the word of Nusku: kingship (belongs) to Sasî. I will destroy the name (and) the seed of Sennacherib."[20] The content of this oracle which announced the destruction of the king is very much in contrast to the official prophecies that were recorded and archived in the palaces, which were universally positive in their prophecies regarding the royal court.

Just as it was rare to archive oracles in the kingdom of Mari, in Assyria it was not common practice to do so either. The Neo-Assyrian corpus of oracles is the largest oracle corpus after Mari and it still contains only a few dozen oracles. It seems only kings Esarhaddon (680–669) and his son king Assurbanipal (668–630) deliberately archived oracles. Here we have chosen to translate only fairly well-preserved oracles.[21] Furthermore, as outlined in the beginning of this chapter, we have excluded the prophecies by people of ambiguous gender.[22]

Bibliography

Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), xlv–lxxv; Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 97–101 and 133–136; Martti Nissinen, "Gender and Prophetic Agency in the Ancient Near East and in Greece," in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho; Ancient Israel and Its Literature 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 27–58; Manfred Weippert, *Götterwort in Menschenmund: Studien zur Prophetie in Assyrien, Israel und Juda* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

8.3.1 I Rejoice

Individual oracles were written down probably fairly soon after the event took place. Such individual notes were compiled into collections in the

19 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, text nos. 109, 111, 113, 114, and 115.

20 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, text no. 115, rev. lines 4′–5′.

21 For texts by female prophets that were deemed too poorly preserved to include here see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, text nos. 69, 72, 81, and 95f.

22 Prophets with uncertain or ambivalent gender include Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, text nos. 68, 71, 72, and 79.

Assyrian court. This text is part of the so-called collection 1, comprising ten oracles that show support for King Esarhaddon (680–669). The oracles of support for Esarhaddon seem to have been issued during the civil war with his brothers that preceded his rise to kingship in 680 BCE. The collection was naturally composed some time after Esarhaddon had defeated his brothers. Here we translate three oracles from this collection which were proclaimed by women. Although we include the three texts under separate headings they were all part of collection 1 – a rather large clay tablet divided into three columns on each side. Each column was further divided into sections with horizontal lines. Each oracle, followed by the name of the prophet, was delineated with such lines. The line numbers here refer to the line numbers in this larger collection.

In the translation below, the divine message, most probably a prophetic oracle of Ištar of Arbela, is placed in quotation marks. After the divine message, the scribe who compiled this collection noted the female prophet who spoke it. It is not known where the place, Dara-ahuya, was located.

col. 2, lines 11′–12′
"I rejoice with Esarhaddon, my king. The city of Arbela rejoices."

col. 2, lines 13′–15′
By the mouth of the woman Remut-allati, from the city of Dara-ahuya which is (located) among the mountains.

Bibliography

Text and translation: See Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), no. 1.3 for transliteration. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), no. 70 for transcription and a thorough bibliography of further studies. Both have an English translation. For photos and information on the size, composition, and date of collection 1, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, xlv–cviii and plates I–III.

8.3.2 I Will Tear the Conspiring Rats into Pieces

This is the second divine message from collection 1 (see the preceding text). Although the beginning of the oracle is destroyed, we have included it, since it is one of the oracles that were probably addressed to the mother of king Esarhaddon, the famous and influential queen Naqi'a (see especially chapter 7 for her inscriptions). At the end of the fourth column an unknown number of lines belonging to this oracle are missing. Thus the oracle begins in mid-sentence.

col. 5, lines 1–2
" . . . shall not receive from him.

col. 5, lines 3–7
The conniving polecats and rats I will tear apart before his feet.

col. 5, lines 8–9
You (Naqi'a) are (who) you are and the king is my king."

col. 5, lines 10–11
By the mouth of woman Issar-beli-da''ini, the woman dedicated (to a deity) by the king.

Bibliography

Text and translation: See Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), text no. 1.7 for transliteration. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), text no. 74 for transcription and a thorough bibliography of further studies. Both have an English translation.

8.3.3 Kingship is Yours

This third oracle from collection 1 is, like the previous oracle, addressed to the mother of king Esarhaddon, Naqi'a. It is a typical oracle in that its main purpose is to express support for the king. Interestingly, the divine "Lady of Arbela," i.e. the goddess Ištar, is quoting a prayer of the queen mother in the text. The goddess is telling the queen mother that she supported Esarhaddon because of her prayers. The reference to "the right" and "the left" refers to the traitorous brothers of Esarhaddon. The last sentence of the oracle is directly addressed to the king.

col. 5, line 12–13
"I am the Lady of Arbela (speaking) to the king's mother.

col. 5, line 14–20
Since you appealed to me saying: 'Those on the right and those on the left you have placed in your lap. (But) my own offspring you made roam the steppe constantly.'

col. 5, line 21–23
Now, king, fear not! Kingship is yours, yours is the strength!"

col. 5, line 24–25
By the mouth of the woman Ahat-abiša, from Arbela.

Bibliography

Text and translation: See Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), text no. 1.8 for transliteration. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), text no. 75 for transcription and a thorough bibliography of further studies. Both have an English translation.

8.3.4 Like a Nursemaid I Will Carry You on My Hip

This text is a long report of a prophecy by a female prophet, Mullissu-kabtat. There are some reconstructions but all in all it is well preserved. The "Palace of Succession" mentioned in the text refers to the official residence of the Assyrian crown prince and the reference to the "head-band" is likewise a reference to Assurbanipal being crowned the crown prince by his father, king Esarhaddon. The oracle expresses support for Assurbanipal during his time as the crown prince of the realm (a position he assumed in 672 BCE).

The oracle uses many obscure and rare expressions, most probably intentionally. Here, even problematic passages and vocabulary have been given a translation but the reader should be aware that at least translations of "pole" and the mysterious passages "Like a *hallulāya*-insect, like an *engurru*" and "I will perform your 'Guard! Guard!'-supplications for you" are less than certain.

obv. lines 1–2
The female prophet Mullissu-kabtat says the following:

obv. lines 2–6
"This is the word of the queen Mullissu: Fear not, Assurbanipal! Until I have done and given to you that which I proclaimed, until you indeed exercise kingship over the sons of the bearded courtiers (and) over the successors of eunuchs – (until that time) I will protect you in the Palace of Succession.

obv. line 7
[Your father . . .] will tie the headband.

obv. lines 8–11
[The . . . kings] of the lands will say to one another: '[Come,] let us go to Assurbanipal. The king has witnesses. [Whatever the gods] destined for our fathers (and) fathers' fathers, [now] may he judge between us.'"

obv. lines 12–13
Mullissu has said: "[You shall reign over] the kings of the lands. You shall reveal the boundaries to them (and) you shall determine their paths.

obv. line 14, rev. lines 1–5
Furthermore, let me speak to you: I will finish the land of Cimmerians like (I did) the land of Elam. I will break the pole and the thorn; I will pluck the bramble as a tuft of wool, I will turn the wasps into a squash. Like a *hallulāya*-insect, like an *engurru*. You will say: 'What does it mean: Like a *hallulāya*-insect, like an *engurru*?' Like a *hallulāya*-insect, I will enter Egypt, like an *engurru*, I will come out.

rev. line 6
You whose mother is Mullissu, do not fear! You whose nursemaid is Lady of Arbela, do not fear!

rev. lines 7–10
Like a nursemaid I will carry you on my hip. (Like) a pomegranate(-shaped pendant), I will place you between my breasts. At night I will be awake and guard you. All day I will give you milk. At dawn I will perform your 'Guard! Guard!'-supplications for you.

rev. line 11
Fear not, you, my calf whom I rear."

Bibliography

Text and translation: Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), text no. 7 for transliteration and commentary. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), text no. 92 for transcription and a thorough bibliography of further studies. Both have an English translation.

8.3.5 I Roam the Open Country

This is a report on a prophecy uttered by a woman named Dunnaša-amur. She is also known from another report, of which only a small fragment is preserved.[23] It seems that the first seven lines are either words of the female prophet or perhaps words of the scribe who made the report. From line 8 onwards, the direct divine speech begins. In the beginning of the report both goddess Mullissu and Ištar (Lady of Arbela) are introduced as benefactors of king Assurbanipal but the direct-speech section is written in first person

23 Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, text no. 95. The reading of the name is problematic and it is possible that this individual is identical with the woman Sinqiša-amur known from one or two oracles (see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, il–l and lii).

singular, suggesting that Ištar and Mullissu speak as one. The break in the text ends this direct speech and when the text resumes after the break, we again see words uttered by mortals: either the female prophet or more probably the scribe who wrote the oracle report. Certainly at least the name of the prophet and the date at the end of the text were written by the scribe.

Regarding the date, one should note that the month of Nisan corresponds roughly to March in our calendar. Furthermore, Assyrians gave each year the name of an important official, which was then used to date documents (eponymy). Bel-šadû'a, governor of Tyre, was this official of the year 650. This means that the oracle was written down during the civil war between king Assurbanipal of Assyria and his brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, who ruled the southern part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Babylonia.

obv. lines 1–2
[Oracle of protection] of Mullissu . . . (and) of the Lady of Arbela.

obv. lines 3–7
[They] are the strongest among the gods. They love and continuously send their love [to] Assurbanipal, the creation of their hands. For the sake of his life they give him heart.

obv. lines 8–15
"I roam the open country desiring life for you. I continually cross rivers and oceans. I traverse mountains and peaks. I continually cross all rivers. Dry and wet weather constantly consume me and ravage my beautiful figure. I am tired and my body is exhausted because of you.

obv. lines 16–27
In the assembly of all the gods I have spoken for your life. My arms are strong, they will not let you down before the gods. My shoulders are always ready to carry you, you in particular. With my lips I am constantly requesting life for you. . . . your life. You will make life plentiful. . . . Nabû. May your lips rejoice! I incessantly speak good words about you [in the assembly of] all [the gods]. I roam the open country desiring [life for you]. [In the midst of woe] I will rise and slaughter your enemy. . . . and he will return to his country."

(end of obverse and beginning of reverse missing or unintelligible, about 12 lines)

rev. lines 1′–3′
May Mullissu and the Lady of Arbela make Assurbanipal, the creation of their hands, live for ever!

(one blank line)

rev. lines 4′–5′
By the mouth of the woman Dunnaša-amur, [from] Arbela.

rev. lines 6′–7′
18th day of the month of Nisan, eponymy of Bel-šadû'a, governor of Tyre.

(rest of the reverse uninscribed)

Bibliography

Text and translation: See Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), text no. 9 for transliteration. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), text no. 94 for transcription and a thorough bibliography of further studies. Both have an English translation and comments on the text. For a photo, see www.cdli.ucla.edu/P337163.

CHAPTER 9

Proverbs and Other Literature

9.1 Proverbs

Mesopotamian scholars use the term "proverb" to designate a wider scope of literature than is usually included within its English definition. Short, pithy sayings make up the majority of Sumerian and Akkadian proverbial literature but interspersed within these compositions are anecdotes, extracts of other literature, fables, and compositions that are not well understood.[1] While there is no uniform practice, sometimes the term "proverb" is used to describe all of these compositions while at other times short, pithy sayings are exclusively in view. The latter definition will be used within this anthology. The extant proverbs from Mesopotamia do not contain attributions of authorship and they were recopied and translated for centuries. In this anthology we have included proverbs which were written from the perspective of a female subject. They do not contain attributions of authorship; nonetheless, scholars assume that some of them might have been authored by females.[2] In our perspective there is not enough evidence to determine if these proverbs were written by women or not. Just because a proverb was written from the perspective of a female subject does not mean that it was written by a woman. However, since many scholars have worked from this assumption and from it have speculated that women wrote these proverbs, we have included them in this anthology.

Proverbs appear in many different settings. Proverbs were incorporated into the curriculum used within scribal schools in order to form a professional identity and ethical vision within the scribal apprentices.[3] The proverbial sayings that students copied ran the gamut from the profound – "Who compares to Justice? It creates life." – to the silly: "The sex appeal of a

1 W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 222.
2 Cf. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 238.
3 Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections*, vol. 1 (Bethesda: CDL, 1997), xix.

shepherd is his testicles; (that of) a gardener is his hair." A few proverbs riff off the scribal craft: "When the scribe knows every entry, when his hand is good, he is indeed a scribe!"[4] There were also wisdom compositions that poked fun at scribal life and provided humorous moments where fellow guild members shared inside jokes with one another. The most famous example of this is "Schooldays," which recounts a day in a schoolchild's life and centers upon the schoolboy recounting his experience of being caned by his teacher.[5] In addition to their use within scribal schools, proverbs were also inserted into letters, which indicates that they circulated within the culture at large and were not merely the creations of scholars.[6] Yet, ancient scribes spent much time and effort compiling large lists of proverbs. These lists were loosely grouped together on the basis of content and, intriguingly, slight variants of proverbs were preserved and transmitted within these collections.

Mesopotamian proverbs predominantly center upon very typical, even mundane, aspects of daily life. Accordingly, occupational life is the most common subject matter yet the lives of the poor – both slaves and poor free persons – are rarely reflected and when they are they are often employed as cautionary tales. This is seen, for instance, in this proverb: "The poor man chews what(ever) he receives."[7] In the occasional instance in which the lives of the poor are explored on their own terms it is almost always done from the perspective of an upper-class observer. For example, this saying reflects the opinion of a slave owner: "A runaway slave girl sleeps badly."[8] Images from agricultural settings and animal husbandry abound but scenes from urban life are far less common. This may reflect an overall conservative nature within ancient proverbial literature and the tendency to transmit wisdom literature that had been received from previous generations.[9]

9.1.1 My Mouth Makes Me Equal to a Man

These two lines appear in a list of Assyrian–Sumerian bilingual proverbs. The proverb immediately before it reads: "The wife of a man who cannot speak eloquently is a female slave." The two proverbs that come after this should be interpreted as a rebuttal since they are written in the first person

4 The proverbs quoted here come from Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, §§1.1, 23.7, and 2.38, respectively.
5 Samuel Noah Kramer, "Schooldays: A Sumerian Composition Relating to the Education of a Scribe," *Journal of the American Oriented Society* 69 (1949): 199–215.
6 Benjamin Foster, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period* (GMTR 2; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 32.
7 Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, §2.19.
8 Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, xxiii.
9 Cf. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, xxiv–xxv.

from the perspective of a female. Both lines are in the Emesal dialect, which is often associated with female speakers. It used to be common for scholars to understand the Emesal dialect as a "woman's language" since in many cases it reproduces the speech of females and goddesses. However, more recent studies have seen Emesal not primarily as a marker of gender but as a derivation of a regional dialect or a way of speaking in particular kinds of performances. It may be that the use of Emesal is determined less by a speaker's gender than by the genre of the text in which it appears.[10]

My mouth makes me equal to a man. My mouth gets me judged a man.

Bibliography

Text and translation: W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 236, 238.

9.1.2 Let Me Go Pluck

This proverb appears on several tablets. On the back of one of them are mathematical calculations, which implies that it was included within the scribal curriculum. It portrays a slave girl saying that she has no authority over her female owner. She asks her husband to release her to go pluck sheep which, apparently, was one of the household tasks delegated to female servants.

I, a slave girl, have no authority over my lady.[11] My husband, let me go pluck!

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1 (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1997), 326.

9.1.3 The Lower Mill Stone

This proverb appears in a three-column tablet from the Middle Babylonian period. The proverb is written in phonetic Sumerian, standard Sumerian, and Akkadian translation. The Sumerian version is in the Emesal dialect. The Sumerian text notes that this was a song, presumably sung by female workers as they ground grain at the mill. It plays off the noisiness associated with this kind of work.

10 Gonzalo Rubio, "Sumerian Morphology," in *Morphologies of Asia and Africa*, vol. 1 (ed. Alan S. Kaye; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 1369–1370.

11 The Akkadian translation of this proverb adds "let me go!" after this phrase.

I do not know the lower mill stone for grinding flour: if it disappears I will not be disappointed.

Bibliography

Text: Bendt Alster, *Sumerian Proverbs in the Schøyen Collection* (CUSAS 2; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2007), 29–30.
Translation and study: Karen Nemet-Nejat, "Akkadian Wisdom Literature," in *Women in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Mark Chavalas; New York: Routledge, 2014), 86.

9.1.4 My Vagina

This proverb is included on a two-column tablet that collects assorted Sumerian proverbs with Akkadian translations. There does not seem to be a particular theme or organizing principle for this collection. The tablet was part of Assurbanipal's library and was copied from another exemplar. The scribe who copied it noted the breaks in the tablet he was copying. Lambert says that in this proverb "an old prostitute is defending her ability to continue her profession." It is certainly possible that this concerns a prostitute – prostitution was very common in the ancient world[12] – however there is nothing explicit within this statement that links its implied speaker to that profession.

My vagina is (still) pleasant; (yet,) among my people it is said of me: "You're finished."

Bibliography

Text and translation: W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 242 and 248.
Study: Karen Nemet-Nejat, "Akkadian Wisdom Literature," in *Women in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Mark Chavalas; New York: Routledge, 2014), 86.

9.1.5 An Expression of Love

This proverb illustrates simple acts of love within family life. It presents a wife saying that her husband gathers food, her children divide it into servings, and the husband picks the bones from his wife's piece of fish. There is a variant (SP 3.112) which is spoken by the husband instead of the wife. This proverb appears in at least two ancient collections.

12 Morris Silver, "Temple/Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia Revisited: Religion in the Economy," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 38 (2007): 631–663.

My husband heaps it up, my child apportions it, let my spouse pick the bones from the fish for me.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Wisdom from Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 399 and Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 26.

9.1.6 Husbands Don't Grow in the Steppe

This proverb reflects a traditional wariness toward the wilderness area of the steppe. It contains an Emesal form which might indicate that it is portraying a female point of view.

A plant as good as a husband does not grow in the steppe.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 27.
Study: Herman Vanstiphout, "On a Sumerian Proverb (SP 1.126)," *NABU* 1996/2, No. 51, 43–44.

9.1.7 Where Shall I Go?

This proverb presents a woman who is afraid of her surroundings. The sky, land, and steppe are populated with scary animals. Unfortunately, the tablet is broken in the place that would explain the role the husband plays in this proverb.

In the sky a raven, on the land a mongoose, in the steppe a lion . . . my husband. Where should I go?

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 28.
Study: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 2, 353.

9.1.8 I Am a Lady

The lady of this proverb is so wealthy that she treats menstruation rags as disposable. She cuts them up instead of having them washed. She is, after all, a lady who wears amazing clothes. The tone is likely sarcastic.

I am a lady of amazing clothes. Let me cut apart my menstruation rag.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 35.

Study: Maurice Lambert, "Recherches sur les proverbes sumeriens de la collection 1," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 42 (1967): 98.

9.1.9 How Your Braids Hang Down

Presumably, a female servant speaks this proverb to her lady.

It is too wide! You don't know how to comb. Your hair is one cubit . . . my lady, you don't . . .

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 37.

9.1.10 A Clumsy Woman

This proverb uses forms of the Emesal dialect and because of this some scholars have assumed that the implied author is female. We should again note the fallacy of this assumption, which we discuss in the introduction to the first proverb (9.1.1). Apparently, this proverb describes a woman who is unable to properly pick up an object or put it down but its larger connotations remain mysterious.

She lifts it up and cannot control it. She lowers it down and she cannot control it.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 38.

9.1.11 Neighborly Insults

This proverb contains elements that could be interpreted as features of Emesal. The speaker, presumably a woman, says that her neighbor would insult her if she found out about her illness. Throughout the ancient world people assumed that illnesses were often a form of divine punishment of the sufferer.

If I tell my neighbor about my disease, she would insult me.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 38.
Study: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 2, 360.

9.1.12 Crushed by a Stone

This proverb is written in the Emesal dialect and presumably represents the speech of a servant woman. In this case, the woman says that her lady has done something to harm her.

A stone belonging to my lady has crushed me.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 164.

9.1.13 A Hunger Strike for Clothing

The second phrase of this proverb is hard to translate. Bendt Alster translates it as "My leather worker(?) does not make multicolored incisions." At the time he wrote, Alster did not know of a use of the word he translated as "leather worker(?)" outside of a lexical list which equated the Sumerian term with an Akkadian word for "functionary." We have followed the definition of this word given by the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary – "female genitals." It seems that this wife is refusing food until her husband gives her the standard of clothing that she desires.

My husband shouldn't bring me bread – my genitals do not have decorations.

Bibliography

Text and translation: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 1, 220.
Study: Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, vol. 2, 431–432.

9.2 Other Literature

9.2.1 Zakûtu Treaty

The textual and iconographic evidence suggests that queens had important roles throughout the Neo-Assyrian era. The queen supported the temple institutions, received divine oracles, and was involved in rituals and in the making of political decisions. She had palaces, households, and servants all over the empire. The queen's household was a constant and important feature in the Neo-Assyrian royal administration and it had extensive holdings of land and offices throughout the land, employing hundreds of people. This household was not the personal property of the woman herself; rather, the title of queen carried with it a large governmental office. Especially noteworthy is that during and after the rule of King Sargon (721–705 BCE), the queen also came to possess her own military units.

Without a doubt the best known Neo-Assyrian queen was Queen Naqi'a, also known by her Akkadian name Zakûtu. She headed the queen's household during the reigns of three kings: Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669), and Assurbanipal (668–ca. 630). The zenith of her influence was during the reign of her son Esarhaddon.

Naqi'a is attested in two inscriptions as building a palace for her son Esarhaddon (see above, 7.1.7), a unique activity for a queen in Mesopotamia. Her correspondence includes polite letters from high officials which reflect her involvement with temples and court politics. In a remarkable letter to her (SAA 18 85), she is apparently requested to send reinforcements to the southern part of the empire. Moreover, Naqi'a is the recipient of a number of prophecies regarding the civil war that preceded her son's ascent to the throne. Some of these prophecies are by women, and therefore translated above, in chapter 8.

Sarah Melville has argued that Naqi'a's extraordinary authority in the Neo-Assyrian court may have been the result of a plan by Esarhaddon to bolster his mother's status. His aim could have been to enable her to ensure the accession of Esarhaddon's son, Assurbanipal, to the throne. This is a plausible hypothesis, although their relationship could perhaps better be described as a mutually beneficial relationship of respect and perhaps even affection than a mere trade-off of power. From the perspective of the Assyrians, it might not have been even relevant to ask if Naqi'a was acting out of self-interest. In many ways, the interests of the kin group *were* the interests of the individual.

The most remarkable text relating to queen Naqi'a is the text known as the "Treaty of Zakûtu." It states that Naqi'a, under her Assyrian alias Zakûtu, bound Assurbanipal's brothers, the whole court, and even the whole nation in unswerving loyalty to the new king Assurbanipal. This is the only Assyrian treaty that was enforced by someone other than the king, and although it is not the only evidence we have regarding Naqi'a's important role in governmental decision-making, it is certainly the clearest. As before, only fully reconstructed words are indicated (by square brackets) and editorial additions to the text are in parenthesis.

obv. lines 1–9

(This is) the loyalty oath of Zakûtu, the queen of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, mother of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (which is established) with Šamaš-šumu-ukin, his (= Assurbanipal's) equal brother, with Šamaš-metu-uballiṭ and the rest of his brothers, with the descendants of the royal line, with the magnates, the governors, the bearded courtiers, the courtiers, the royal entourage, with those exempt from taxes and all those who enter the palace, with the sons of Assyria, the big and the small.

obv. lines 9–12

Anyone who (is included) in this treaty, which Zakûtu the queen concluded with all the people of the land for Assurbanipal, the son, her pleasing descendant:

obv. lines 12–15
(Indeed), anyone (of you) who should . . . lie an unpleasant, unkind word and make revolt against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria;

obv. lines 16–19
(anyone of you who should) devise an evil scheme [in] your heart of hearts, (or) talk the unkind talk against [your lord] Assurbanipal, king of Assyria;

obv. lines 19–22
(anyone of you who should) speak an unpleasant suggestion, counsel evil counsel of conspiracy (and) rebellion [in] your hearts, against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria;

obv. lines 23–24
(anyone of you who should) [with . . .] another talk about the death [of] your lord [Assurbanipal, king] of Assyria;

obv. lines 25–27
[May Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš,] Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, [Mars, Sirius . . .]

(two lines destroyed)

rev. line 1
. . . south and [north . . .]

rev. lines 2–7
[And if] you from this day forth (hear) them speak an unpleasant [word] of conspiracy (and) rebellion [concerning] your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you shall come forth and inform Zakûtu his mother and your lord Assurbanipal [king of Assyria].

rev. lines 7–12
And if you hear of killing and destroying [of] your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you shall come forth and inform Zakûtu [his mother] and your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria.

rev. lines 12–18
And if you hear that they are devising an evil scheme against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you shall come forth and in the presence of Zakûtu his mother and in the presence of your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you shall proclaim (this).

rev. lines 18–27
And if you hear and know about troops ready to strike (or) about conspirators in your midst – be they bearded courtiers or courtiers, or his brothers, or descendants of the royal line, or your brothers, or your friends or (anyone)

among the people of the land – (if) you hear (about it) and [know] (about it), you shall seize and [kill] (them). You shall bring them to Zakûtu [his mother and to your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria].

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Studies: Jacob Lauinger, "The Neo-Assyrian adê: Treaty, Oath, or Something Else?," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 19 (2013): 99–115; Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (SAAS 23; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015), 39–61. See also the discussion in Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Treaties," where the text was first edited as a whole; Sarah Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAAS 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999), especially 40–42 and 91–92.

9.2.2 A Perfume-making Recipe of Tapputi-belet-ekallim

Remarkably, two perfume recipes from the Middle Assyrian Period (roughly 1400–1000) were attributed to the expertise of female perfume-makers.[13] Of the two texts, only the one translated here preserves a colophon in full.[14] According to this colophon, the compilation of recipes for making perfumed "canus" oil are said to have been dictated, "according to the mouth" of Tapputi-belet-ekallim, the female perfume-maker (Akkadian *muraqqītu*). What "according to the mouth" means with regard to the question of authorship can be debated. For example, the colophon

13 The authors of the volume are very grateful to Dr Eduardo Escobar (University of Berkeley) for including his translation and notes on this remarkable text in our volume. The translation is completely Escobar's and the introduction was written jointly with the authors.

14 The other text is transliterated and translated in Erich Ebeling, *Parfümrezepte und kultische texte aus Assur* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1950), 41–46 (for cuneiform copy see plates 6–8, VAT 9659). For archival context see Olof Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur: A Survey of the Material from the German Excavations*, vol. 1 (Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 6; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1985), text M2: 21.

was previously translated as "copied on the command of Tapputi-belet-ekallim."[15] However, considering that her profession is explicitly mentioned, it rather seems that the literal translation would fit better: according to the tablet, Tapputi-belet-ekallim is recorded as having *dictated* the recipe, which was then written on a clay tablet and baked by a scribe. Middle Assyrian perfume recipes were found within a mixed archaeological context preserving both Middle Assyrian and later Neo-Assyrian clay tablets.[16] Nevertheless, an exact date for the text can be found in the colophon, which dates the text to the fifth regnal year of king Tukulti-Ninurta I (whose reign is conventionally dated to 1244–1208): "month Muhur-ilāni on the 20th day; the eponymate of Šunu-qardu *rab šaqê*." In other words, the text most probably dates to the year 1239 BCE.[17]

Generally speaking, such "recipes" are rare in Mesopotamia. Unlike in many later historical periods, cuneiform literature does not preserve technical manuals on agriculture, metal working, or textile production. Rather, the corpora of Akkadian technical recipes is spread throughout cuneiform's long intellectual history: the Old Babylonian period (roughly 1900–1500) preserves a set of culinary texts; from the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods (roughly 1400–1000) we have manuals that instruct one on methods of horse-training, on making colored glasses, and producing perfumed oils; from the Neo-Assyrian period (roughly 900–600), a compelling set of instructions for making colored glasses and kilns; and finally, from the Neo-Babylonian period (roughly 600–539), a single tablet with instructions for dyeing wool in a variety of exotic colors.

As a genre, manuals are unified by a common linguistic register, characterized by conditional clauses and the use of second-person verbs that instruct an anonymous doer ("you") to make a certain product or reproduce a particular expert skill. One of the principal goals of manuals is to transmit expert knowledge by means of step-by-step instructions. The transmission of expert knowledge via manuals, however, presents a number of compelling and complex questions regarding the nature of technical knowledge itself, its value for cuneiform intellectual societies, and the efficacy of transmitting "hands-on" knowledge by means of texts. Questions may also be asked of particular manuals, such as this one's unusual attribution to a female perfume-making expert.

15 Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (AOAT 2; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1968), 11 and text no. 57.

16 See further, Olof Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur: A Survey of the Material from the German Excavations*, vol. 2 (Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 8; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986), text N1:34.

17 Helmut Freydank, "Zu den Eponymenfolgen des 13. Jahrhunderts v.Chr. in Dūr-Katlimmu," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 32/1 (2005): 45–56.

PROCESS AND LANGUAGE OF ASSYRIAN PERFUME-MAKING

In *Concerning Odours*, the third-century BCE philosopher Theophrastus relates the following: "They use spices in the making of all perfumes; some to thicken the oil, some in order to impart their odour. For in all cases they thicken the oil to some extent to make it take the odour better . . . The less powerful spices are used for thickening, and then at a later stage they put in the one whose odour they wish to secure."[18] The process that Theophrastus summarizes here is a process not altogether different from those we find described in the perfume-making recipes from late second-millennium Assur. These texts, including the one translated below, describe in detail how one ought to infuse oils with aromatic plants and spices. The result is a scented oil or pomade, which retains the scent of the original plants and aromatics, or a mixture thereof.

The process of infusing oils with floral and herbal scents is achieved through a number of processes, including maceration (*ibiad ilabbik*, "it is to steep overnight"), and both cold and heated infusion. Once the base oil was adequately infused with the desired spices it was filtered through various containers or vessels, varying in shape and size (e.g., a *ḫirsu*-vessel could carry ca. 40 litres). One of these vessels is called a *ḫirsu*-vessel, and it is used in tandem with a fine cloth called a *sūnu*, which functions similarly to cheese-cloth, as in the following passage: "At dawn, when the sun rises, you filter the liquid and these aromatics through a *sūnu*-cloth into a *ḫirsu*-vat. You clarify the mixture (by filtering it) from this *ḫirsu*-vat to another *ḫirsu*-vat."[19]

Filtering is an essential step in the process of perfume-making, as is the careful removal of unwanted particulates. Rare technical terms appear throughout recipes and related procedural texts, and although such nouns will often appear untranslated, as *minduḫru* and *paḫutu* above, we can nevertheless assess the general function of these terms within the process; in this case, *minduḫru* and *paḫutu* represent particulates or unwanted materials that are to be removed (*nakāru*) from the infused oil product.

The identification of particular plants, spices, and other ingredients remains tentative. Still, other ingredients, such as "water from the palace well of Assur" (*mû ša būrte ša ekallim ša Assur*), suggest that both the ingredients and aromatic products described belonged to a rarified community. Only further navigation through the technical language of the recipes will cast light on the shared technical vocabulary, the processes described, and the cultural value of recipe texts in ancient Mesopotamia. These concerns will be among the focuses of a forthcoming PhD dissertation on recipes

18 Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works on Odours and Weather Signs* (trans. Arthur Hort; London: William Heinemann, 1916).

19 See the translation below, obv. col. 1, lines 8–10.

within cuneiform intellectual history.[20] The translation offered here is not a full critical edition of the text. It has been modified according to the needs of the present volume. Parentheses are used throughout the translation in order to ease the flow of the prose; reconstructed or broken sections are represented by square brackets.

obv. col. 1, line 1
If you want to process aromatic cane oil: (take) 2 seahs worth of cane, along with their *tubāqu*-roots (i.e. the whole cane).

lines 2–4
Once you have washed them, you set down a *šahtiṣu*-sized *diqāru*-vessel and heat *tābilu*-aromatics with fresh, high-quality water from a palace well of Aššur. You transfer (the mixture) into a *harû*-vessel.

lines 4–6
You (then) pour on top of this liquid mixture, within the *harû*-vessel: 1 liter of *ḫāmimu*-aromatic, 1 liter of *jaruttu*-aromatic, (and) 1 liter of myrtle, good-quality (and) filtered.

lines 6–8
These are your measurements, to be apportioned according to the amount of water taken. You perform (the steps prescribed) at sunset and nightfall! (The mixture) is to steep overnight.

lines 8–10
At dawn, when the sun rises, you filter the liquid and these aromatics through a *sūnu*-cloth into a *ḫirsu*-vat. You clarify the mixture (by filtering it) from this *ḫirsu*-vat to another *ḫirsu*-vat.

lines 11–12
You remove the *minduḫru*-particulates. You wash 3 liters of crushed nut-sedge with the liquid mixture of these aromatics. You remove the *paḫḫu*-particulates.

lines 13–14
You put on top of this liquid mixture of aromatics, within a *ḫirsu*-bowl: 3 liters of myrtle, 3 liters of cane, crushed and filtered.

lines 14–16
You measure out 4 seahs of this liquid mixture that has (steeped) overnight with aromatics.

20 E. Escobar, *Technology as Knowledge: Cuneiform Technical Recipes and the Material World* (Berkeley). There are a number of small fragments that are not included in the translation that follows as Escobar was still in the process of determining where they might be placed.

lines 16–17
You filter through a sieve: 1½ liters of unfiltered mash made from almonds (together with) 2 cup-fulls – (using) small cups – of wood shavings from the *kanaktu*-tree.

lines 17–19
You gather up the oil (produced) in a *harû*-vessel. In the liquid mixture . . .

obv. col. 2, line 1
You remove it from the interior of the *diqāru*-vessel . . ..

line 2
the ingredients . . .

line 3
In your fourth pouring . . .

line 4
You heat up . . . *tābīlu*-aromatics..

line 5–7
[You pour] . . . ½ liter of cane, ½ liter of *asu*-aromatic . . . on top of the heated liquid mixture. (The mixture) is to steep overnight.

line 8
. . . and these aromatics . . ..

line 9
. . . from this *ḫirsu*-bowl [to another *ḫirsu*-bowl] . . .

lines 10–12
You remove the unwanted particulates. You measure out . . . which are sifted, 4 seahs of liquid, which from . . .

lines 12–14
You ignite . . . this reed and *asu*-aromatic. You pour into the mixture: water that is like . . . (and the various) oils. [You stir it] with a stirrer.

lines 15–18
Once the fat oils, the water, and aromatics have penetrated each other (and) have intermingled . . . you gather the (fire?) beneath the *diqāru*-vessel . . .

(rest of column broken)

rev. col. 1, line 1′
[You measure out . . . amount] of this liquid mixture that has (steeped) overnight with [aromatics.]

lines 2′–4′
You scrape it off; you remove the *ṭinṭinu*-particulates . . . this liquid mixture . . . you filter it and you clarify it.

lines 5′–7′
. . . your liquid mixtures, those which you have [clarified] . . . you pour it out . . . [you add] 3 seahs of *pirṣaduḫḫu*-aromatics onto the top of this liquid mixture . . .

lines 8′–9′
The liquid that is mixed and has been heated . . .. you stir with a stirrer.

lines 10′–11′
. . . (once the oil and aromatics) have interpenetrated. . . . fire . . . you cover up the top of the *diqāru*-vessel.

lines 12′–15′
from daybreak . . . you gather the fire beneath the *diqāru*-vessel . . . the oils, waters, and aromatics . . . the liquid mixtures and *šēlûtu* which . . .

(rest of column broken)

rev. col. 2, lines 1′–3′
at daybreak . . . (the aromatics) which have interpenetrated each other . . . fire . . . you cover the top of the *diqāru*-vessel, you cool it off.

lines 3′–6′
You make prepare a *šappatu*-jar reed oils. You lay a *sūnu*-cloth with a *bittu* across the *šappatu* jar, then, taking a little oil at a time, you strain it through the *sūnu*-cloth into the *šappatu* jar.

lines 6′–8′
You go about removing the *ṭišṭišu* and *midduḫru* particulates that have been left over in the bottom of the *diqāru*-vessel.

colophon
Perfume-making recipe for 2 seahs of processed cane oil, fit for a king, according to the mouth of Tapputi-belet-ekallim, the perfume-maker: month *Muhur-ilāni* on the 20th day; the eponymate of Šunu-qardu, the chief cupbearer.

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PART III

Conclusions

CHAPTER 10

Women's Writing in Mesopotamia

We began this book with three chapters of introduction to help our reader more productively engage with the translations in this anthology. We discussed the development of writing in Mesopotamia (chapter 1); described the lives of Mesopotamian women in general terms (chapter 2), and outlined an interpretative framework for studying gender and authorship as it pertains to the texts presented in this volume (chapter 3). We want to revisit some of these discussions as we consider what these texts tell us about the female authors of the ancient world. Particularly, we want to revisit a few important points of chapter 3.

First, our understanding of authorship encompasses texts that women personally wrote, texts they composed or dictated, and texts they commissioned. Nor do we stop there, since we also include texts that reflect what the ancient scribes thought women should have been saying and writing (e.g., the pseudo-autobiography of Adad-guppi). Finally, we include compositions that scholars speculate might have been composed by women (e.g., proverbs). All these different forms of authorship are evaluated on a continuum of instrumental agency on one side to independent agency on the other. In that sense, all of the texts within this anthology are of equal analytical value.

Instrumental authorship reflects the act of transmission. In other words, a scribe copied things that she wants to transfer on to future generations; she did not create a new composition. Examples of this are the scholarly texts written by women that are presented in chapter 4. Most of the texts that exhibit instrumental agency were used within the scribal curriculum and they are often compositions that modern readers would call "literary" texts. At the other end of the continuum we could place the Neo-Assyrian oracle query written by a woman (see 8.1.7). It is a new composition of her own generation. In her creation of it, the woman expressed independent agency. Often such new compositions are non-literary texts, meant to serve a specific, temporary need.

The relationship between independent and instrumental agency is not dichotomous since all copying necessarily engenders variation and all original compositions (especially in Mesopotamia) use the existing tradition

(e.g., the opening phrases of letters, or certain phrasing in prayers). Thus all authorship sits on a scale starting from independent creative effort of the author and sliding toward the other end of the spectrum: the faithful copyist transmitting the culture to future generations. In addition to this continuum, we distinguish between texts that were actually pressed into wet clay by women versus texts that have been dictated or commissioned by them and written by a (presumably) male scribe. The foursquare diagram formed by these factors (see Figure 3.1) is naturally only a heuristic tool that illustrates the general concept since with many particular texts their specific authorial factors are uncertain.

Now that we have reviewed our use of the concept of "authorship," we would like to address another important concern. It seems highly improbable that femininity would have been constructed in the same way in all the geographical and chronological variety that forms "Mesopotamian culture." Thus, we can note that when we talk about gender and authorship in the ancient Near East we are actually talking about a myriad femininities, masculinities, and other identities that were being constructed in acts of writing, not just the binary option of male versus female. Gender is something that is actively constructed by the actions of individuals. In other words, it is not something that "exists"; it is something that is "done."[1] Thus the question presents itself: what kind of femininity were the actions of these female authors creating?

When we started this project, many of our colleagues were not convinced that there would be enough texts authored by women for a book-length anthology. This proved to be an illusion as we dug deep into the sources. Although this volume does not present an exhaustive catalogue of all the cuneiform texts authored by women, it includes all literary works by them that we could find and gives a representational sample on their non-literary texts. As such, it outlines the approximate scope of women's writings. Even so, the writings of women form a tiny portion of the tens of thousands of published cuneiform texts. From this perspective, the acts of writing in Mesopotamia created a predominantly masculine space. The crucial question then becomes: how and why did some female individuals enter this male space?

We should point out that evidence of female scribes is present in most Mesopotamian cultures and if this collection of texts has shown anything, it has shown that women are involved in writing all throughout Mesopotamian history. Furthermore, although this anthology does not include letters or literary texts from male authors, it seems that the texts presented here are not all that different from those written by men. As

1 See further Saana Svärd, "Studying Gender: A Case Study of Female Administrators," in *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel; Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 459–470.

indicated in the volume, there are occasionally slight gender-specific tendencies, e.g., the gender of deities invoked in the Neo-Babylonian letters. However, when taken as a whole, it seems that Mesopotamian women were engaged in the same literary activities as men. There were not as many female writers as male writers but the women who did write wrote in similar ways to their male counterparts. When one compares the text genres that appear in this volume to the entire generic framework of Mesopotamian texts there are no hulking gaps. There are some genres that do not appear in our collection, such as mathematical texts, omen collections, and astral observations, possibly because women were not educated in these highly specialized fields of knowledge. However, in all other respects nothing stands out as systematically different from the writings of males. In other words, difference is mainly quantitative, not qualitative.

Why, then, did some women enter the male arena of writing? To answer this question we have to take an intersectional view on gender. As in modern times, expectations and gender roles are different for people from different socio-economic backgrounds and there are many variables that intersect with gender. Ethnicity, age, occupation, and class are all important factors. For our discussion here, two factors rise above others. First, as can be seen from the introductory chapters, right from the start writing was a tool for kings and the elite and it remained so until the end of the cuneiform tradition. Most of the female authors were members of the palace or temple elite. Second, some women entered the arena of writing because of their writing skills, their profession, rather than because of their elite status. It does not seem impossible that the intellectual ability of certain females could have acted as a vehicle for their upward class mobility as they entered the scribal profession.

If we finally ask the question: what kind of femininity are the acts of writing documented in this volume creating?, there is no one answer that we can give. A lullaby authored by a woman is creating a femininity of motherhood, a political treaty composed for a queen is constructing a femininity of rulership, and of course the many texts written by female scribes are making a femininity of competence and professionalism. The common denominator is that these acts of writing are constructing "female" as an active subject in Mesopotamian societies.

As stated above, as far as we can see the texts written and authored by women are no different from texts authored by men. One could even talk about women "acting as men" as they occupied a male gender role in their scribal activity. However, this is too simplistic an approach, leaving little space for understanding how gender differences were constructed. We recommend a more nuanced view. It could be that in the context of writing the elite role or the scribal role of these female individuals was more important than their gender. This broad statement has to remain only a

suggestion for now. In order to confirm this hypothesis, each text genre and dialect would need a detailed analysis of vocabulary, rhetorics, etc., to see if indeed the texts authored by women are different from the texts authored by men. For example, are women portrayed differently in the texts authored by women versus texts authored by men? Based on our own combined experience with male-authored cuneiform sources, it does not seem so, but more detailed studies would be needed on the topic.

Finally, we would like to indulge in reflecting on our place in the scheme of authorship. Millennia ago, Mesopotamian scribes wrote texts in many different ways. Some of their texts were short-lived while some entered the Mesopotamian stream of tradition and were copied by generations of scribal students. Then, eventually, the texts slept the long sleep of centuries buried under rubble and sand with no one around to read them until some curious nineteenth-century archaeologists dug them up again. Once the texts were discovered they had to be deciphered in order to be read. Numerous scholars dedicated their lives to figuring out the cuneiform script and decoding the languages it contained. These scholars produced a new field of study and along with it new terminology. Journal and monograph series were created, entirely new publishing houses sprang into existence to disseminate the knowledge coming from this field of study. Mesopotamian texts thousands of years old were once again being copied, edited, and translated, thus becoming part of a new stream of tradition, the primary source canon of Assyriology. And finally, there is us, standing on the shoulders of these thousands of scribes and scholars, our work one more ephemeral link in a tradition that spans millennia. Our modest hope is that our interpretations of the texts can offer some new insights and help in some small part to build a bridge to that farthest land, the past.

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